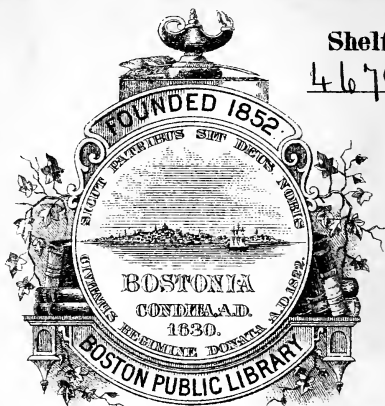


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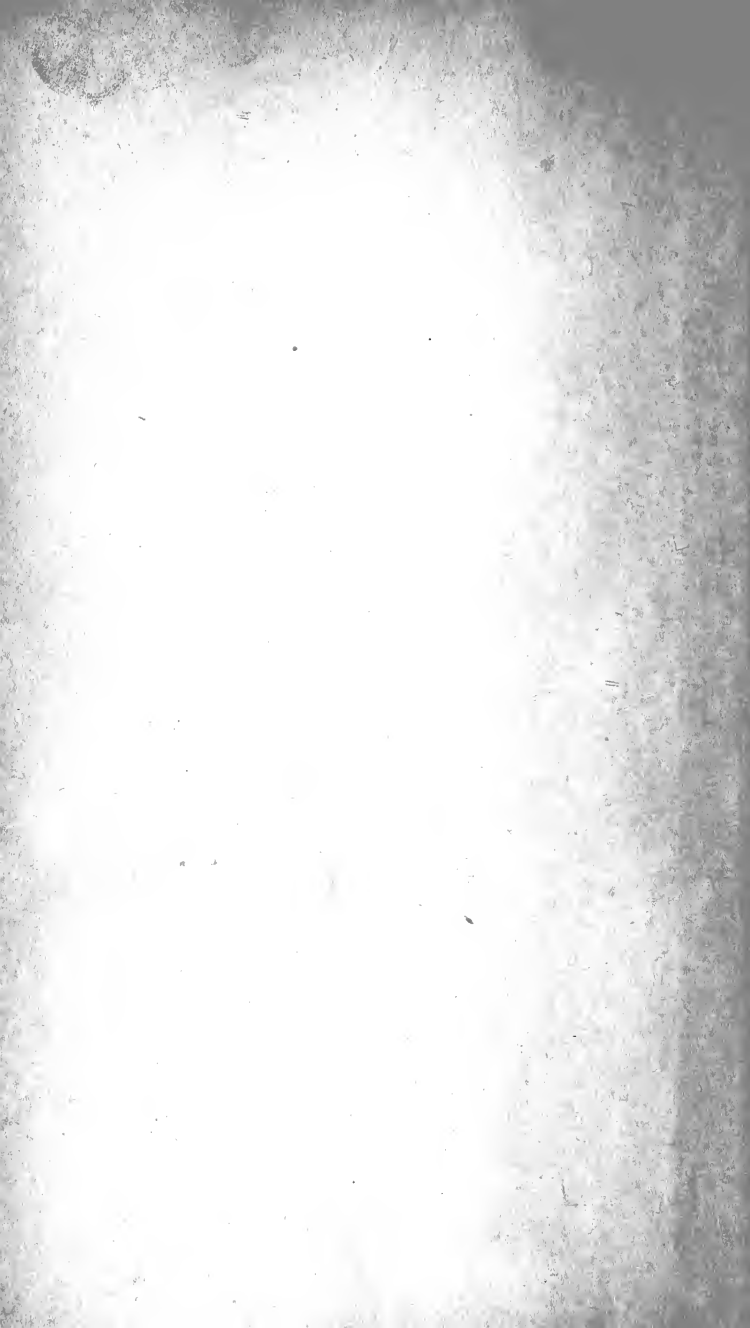
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THE PARASITE,

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OR

HOW TO MAKE ONE'S FORTUNE.

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A COMEDY IN FIVE ACTS.

AFTER THE FRENCH OF PICARD.

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PHILADELPHIA:  
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## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

DE NARBONNE, *Minister of State.*

MADAME BELMONT, *his mother.*

CHARLOTTE, *his daughter.*

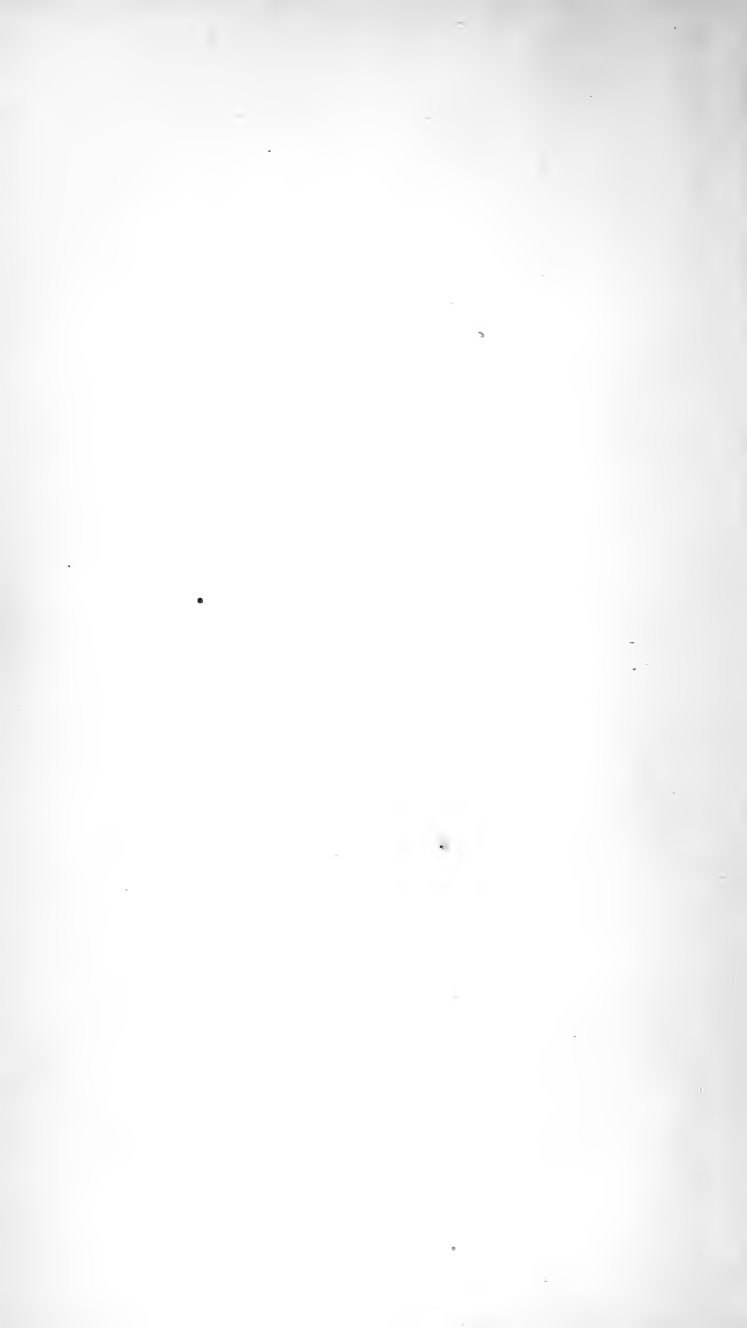
SELICOUR, }  
LA ROCHE, } *subordinates of the Minister.*  
FIRMIN, }

CHARLES FIRMIN, *lieutenant, son of the latter.*

MICHAEL, *the Minister's valet.*

ROBINEAU, *a young rustic, related to Selicour.*

SCENE—PARIS. *In an anteroom of the ministerial mansion.*



# THE PARASITE,

OR

## HOW TO MAKE ONE'S FORTUNE.

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### ACT FIRST.

#### SCENE I.

*Firmin and Charles.*

CHARLES. What a fortunate accident! Just think, father!

FIRMIN. What is it?

CHARLES. I have found her again.

FIRMIN. Found whom?

CHARLES. Charlotte. Ever since my residence in Paris I have been looking for her in vain at all the places of amusement, and, on going to your office to-day for the very first time, my lucky star decrees that I shall meet her.

FIRMIN. But tell me how.

CHARLES. Why, just think! This charming girl, whom I visited at her aunt's in Colmar,—Charlotte, whom I love and ever shall love,—is the daughter——

FIRMIN. Of whom?

CHARLES. Of your employer, the new Minister. She was known to me by the name of Charlotte only.

FIRMIN. Whose daughter did you say?

CHARLES. Monsieur de Narbonne's.

FIRMIN. And you *still* love her?

CHARLES. More than ever, father! She did not

recognize me, I believe. I was just on the point of making my bow, when you entered, and, indeed, it was well you prevented me. For, what might I have said to her ! My confusion would have been perceived, and would have betrayed my feelings. I am no longer master of myself. She has been my sole thought during the six months which have elapsed since we last met ; she forms the sum, the soul, of my poetical effusions ; the applause I have received is due to her alone ; for my love is the god inspiring me.

FIRMIN. A poet and lover is persuaded of many things at the age of twenty. At your years I, too, made verses and wasted time. It is a pity that the beautiful delusion robs us of the prime of life. And if some hope could only be entertained of this love ! But you strive for something forever unattainable. Charlotte de Narbonne is the daughter of a rich and eminent man, whilst all our wealth consists of my situation and your pay.

CHARLES. Is not that, however, in some measure your own fault, father ? Pardon me ; but to what may a man of your capacities not aspire ! Were you to display your worth, you might, perhaps, occupy the Minister's place yourself, instead of being his clerk, and your son could boldly seek to win Charlotte.

FIRMIN. According to you, your father is the greatest genius living. Enough, my son ! I know better what my powers are. I have some practice, and can make myself useful ; yet how many men, immeasurably above me, remain in obscurity and are supplanted by insolent upstarts ! No, my son, let us not attempt to soar too high.

CHARLES. But neither think too meanly of ourselves. What ! Are you not vastly more than this Selicour, your superior, that conceited blockhead, who did as he liked under the former Minister, worming himself into favor by every species of meanness, giving away places, fraudulently obtaining pensions, and who, I hear, is already everything in the eyes of the new Minister ?

FIRMIN. What have you to accuse Selicour of? Are his duties not properly discharged?

CHARLES. Yes, because *you* assist him. You cannot deny that you perform three-quarters of his work.

FIRMIN. We must do good turns for one another. If I discharge his duties, he often discharges mine.

CHARLES. Exactly! Therefore you should occupy his place, and he yours.

FIRMIN. I will not dispossess another of his situation, and am content to be where I am, in obscurity.

CHARLES. You should endeavor to reach as high a position as possible. That you kept at a distance under the former Minister reflects honor upon your way of thinking, and I admired you all the more for it; you thought too highly of yourself to obtain through favor what was due to your merit. But De Narbonne, I am told, is an excellent man, who seeks out merit and desires to do good. Why will you, from excess of modesty, still abandon the field to incompetency and intrigue?

FIRMIN. Your hastiness leads you to exaggerate Selicour's faults and my deserts. Granted that Selicour, considering his mediocre talents, aims too high, he is honest and means well. Whether he does his work himself, or whether another does it for him, what matters it, so it is done? And granted that he knows less, do I know more on that account? Can his incompetency increase *my* worth? I have been very well pleased hitherto to live in obscurity, seeking no higher goal. Shall I change these sentiments in my old age? You declare my place is too bad for me. Be it so! Far better than that I should be too bad for my place.

CHARLES. And I must, then, resign Charlotte?

## SCENE II.

*La Roche, Firmin, Charles.*

FIRMIN. Is not that La Roche coming hither?

LA ROCHE (*dejectedly*). The same.

FIRMIN. Why so melancholy? What has happened?

LA ROCHE. You are going to the office. Happy man that you are! I—I shall enjoy the pleasant morning, and promenade.

FIRMIN. What do you mean, La Roche? Are you no longer——

LA ROCHE (*shrugging his shoulders*). No longer. My place has been given to somebody else. Last evening I got my walking-papers.

CHARLES. Good heavens!

LA ROCHE. My wife knows nothing of it yet. Do not, I entreat you, let her suspect anything. She is ill; it would kill her.

CHARLES. You need not fear. From us she shall learn nothing.

FIRMIN. But tell me, La Roche, how——

LA ROCHE. Can I be reproached with the least neglect? I do not wish to speak in praise of myself; but I can keep a record and carry on my correspondence as well as any man, I think. I have contracted no debts; no complaint can be made against my morals; I am the first to enter and the last to leave the office; and yet—discharged!

FIRMIN. Whoever knows you must bear witness to the truth of what you say.

CHARLES. But who can have rendered you this unkind service?

LA ROCHE. Who? It is a service of friendship from Selicour.

CHARLES. Is it possible?

LA ROCHE. I have it from a reliable source.

FIRMIN. Explain, La Roche.

LA ROCHE. You know that Selicour and I were born in the same village. We are of the same age. The little writing he can do I taught him; for my father was the chanter of the place. I also initiated him into business, and he exhibits his gratitude by sending me off and putting in my place some relation or other of our new Minister's valet.

CHARLES. A fine plan!

FIRMIN. But cannot something still be done?

LA ROCHE. I expect advice from you, Monsieur Firmin. I was just about to ask it, knowing, as I do, that you think like an upright man. Listen! I care not for the situation; but I will have my revenge. This impudent fellow, so supple and cringing to those above him, imagines he can oust a poor wretch like me with impunity. Beware, friend Selicour! your despised adversary shall cause you serious trouble. And though I should irretrievably lose my situation, my means of support,—I must be revenged! For my friends I would jump into the fire; but my enemies shall remember me.

FIRMIN. Not so, my dear La Roche! To forgive and forget is the revenge of the noble.

LA ROCHE. No mercy, sir, for scoundrels! To unmask villains is a good and meritorious work. His situation, you very well know, belongs of right to *you*, and that for more than *one* reason. But let a man work and toil till the sweat pours from his brow, he will have wasted time and labor! Who cares about his deserts? Who gives them a thought? Let him cringe, flatter, make servile bows, and fawn like a little puppy,—ah, that is an invaluable recommendation! That is the road to fortune and honor! That is what Selicour did, and you see how well he has succeeded.

FIRMIN. Are you not wronging the good man, my dear La Roche?

LA ROCHE. I, wrong him! Well, well, I will not pretend to a profound knowledge of man; but I see through Selicour. I have him! I do not know myself as perfectly as I know *him*. Even while at school

one could readily foresee what he would become. He danced around the schoolmaster, listening and fawning, and was expert in appropriating what was due to others and putting his eggs into others' nests. He recoiled from no meanness to ingratiate and insinuate himself. As he arrived at a mature age, the same things were practiced on a large scale. Playing now the hypocrite, now the jester, as circumstances demanded, he sailed with every wind. Do not imagine I am slandering him. Everybody knows how affairs were managed under the Minister's predecessor. Well, —he is dead, I will speak no evil of him; but it is wonderful how this Selicour caressed his weaknesses and vices by the most scandalous and disreputable services. And scarcely was the Minister fallen, when he was the first to forsake and deny him!

CHARLES. But by what means does he contrive to keep his ground with the present Minister, who is such an estimable man?

LA ROCHE. By what means? By hypocrisy. The fellow knows how to accommodate himself to those with whom he deals, and to assume different characters as occasions render necessary. Nor is he more particular about doing a good action, if he can gain something by it, than about a piece of knavery, if it promotes his end.

CHARLES. But Monsieur de Narbonne has a penetrating mind, and must soon discover what he is.

LA ROCHE. That is precisely what he fears. But poor as his brain is in all useful knowledge, the more fertile is it in crafty devices. Thus, for example, he plays the busy man, overwhelmed with affairs, and so escapes every proper interview in which his ignorance might be exposed. Moreover, he cherishes no trifling projects; I know them very well, though he fancies they lie in deep concealment.

FIRMIN. What projects are those?

LA ROCHE. De Narbonne, who now enjoys great influence with the government, is looking for a person competent to fill the important position of ambassador;



he has the right of presentation, and the person he recommends will be appointed. This De Narbonne also has an only daughter, seventeen years of age, beautiful, amiable, and immensely rich. Now, if having obtained this high office, Selicour succeeds in leaving the country and making himself invisible to the clear-sighted Minister, he will be enabled, by the aid of a skillful and discreet secretary, to hide his doltishness for a long time. And when at length it becomes apparent, as it must, what harm can result to the Minister's son-in-law? Hence the Minister must be won first, and so he puts on the air of an experienced diplomatist. The Minister's mother is a good, garrulous old lady, who professes to be an excellent judge, and prides herself upon her musical discrimination. He has insinuated himself into her good graces, entertained her with charades and sonnets, yes, and the bungler has had the boldness to thrum airs and songs upon the guitar of an evening. The young lady has read novels, and toward her he acts the sentimentalist, the lover. Being thus an established favorite of the whole family, petted by the mother, esteemed by the daughter, he has as much as already got the position, and will shortly ask the daughter in marriage.

CHARLES. What! Can he have the audacity to woo Charlotte?

LA ROCHE. He has it, you may believe me.

CHARLES. Charlotte, whom I love, whom I adore!

LA ROCHE. You love her? *You?*

FIRMIN. He is a silly boy. He has lost his wits. Do not listen to him!

LA ROCHE. What! Is it possible? Nay, Monsieur Firmin, this love is no folly whatever. Have patience, it may lead to something. This love is just what I require; it is specially suited to my projects.

CHARLES. What may your dreams be?

LA ROCHE. This Selicour shall be blown into the air! Into the air, I say. Utterly lost! In his ambition he shall be unhorsed by the father, in his love, by the son.

FIRMIN. But I beg of you——

LA ROCHE. Let *me* manage! Let *me* manage, I say! And sooner or later you shall be the ambassador and Charles shall marry Mademoiselle Charlotte.

CHARLES. I, marry Charlotte!

FIRMIN. I, the ambassador!

LA ROCHE. Well! well! You deserve more to be so than Selicour, I should think.

FIRMIN. Before obtaining us such splendid positions, my dear La Roche, I think you should be anxious about recovering your own.

CHARLES. This is like our friend. It is his way. Always undertaking something, always devising plans. But that is not sufficient. Adroitness and prudence are needed for their execution, and our friend has often got into trouble by taking things so coolly.

LA ROCHE. It may be, perhaps I promise more than I can keep; still all I see animates my hopes, and there is no harm in making the attempt. For myself I would not intrigue at any price; but to blow up this Selicour, to render my friends a service, that is commendable, that is delightful, that inspires me with heavenly joy,—and as for success, there cannot be the slightest doubt of it.

FIRMIN. Not the slightest doubt? Then you have already perfected your plan?

LA ROCHE. Perfected it? Why, I have scarcely thought about it yet; but that will all come right, of course.

FIRMIN. Ah, this dangerous plot has not progressed far, I see.

LA ROCHE. Never fear. I will extricate myself with honor; Selicour shall not get the better of me,—he shall not, I warrant you. Why take a roundabout way? I shall go straight and have myself announced to the Minister. It is not difficult to gain admittance to his presence; he loves justice, and can endure to hear the truth.

FIRMIN. What! Can you be bold enough——

LA ROCHE. Tush! I am not timid. I fear nobody.

In a word, I shall speak to the Minister and enlighten him. He will see how scandalously he has been deceived,—that is the work of half an hour,—Selicour will be dismissed, covered with disgrace and shame, and I shall achieve a most complete triumph. Yes, I am not sure but what I shall commiserate the poor devil, when he is thus ignominiously thrust out-of-doors.

CHARLES. Whatever you do, my dear La Roche, in no case mix up me and my love with this matter. I hope nothing, I dare not elevate my wishes so high. But—but for my father you might do a great deal.

FIRMIN. Let me answer for myself, my son. You mean well, my dear La Roche, but your good heart is running off with your reflection. What a shadowy project this is you have contrived! An empty chimaera! And though its success were as certain as its failure, my voice would never be raised in its favor. These brilliant positions are not for me, nor I for them: inclination and destiny have assigned me a humbler sphere. Why should I change when I feel contented? I hope the state may not seek me, and am too proud to beg for an office, but still less can I allow another to beg for me. Provide, then, for your own wants. You have friends enough, each one of whom will gladly intercede in your behalf.

LA ROCHE. Then you both refuse my services? No matter! I will make your fortunes for you, whether you will or not! [*Exit.*]

FIRMIN. He is a fool, but a good one, and his misfortune affects me deeply.

CHARLES. Give me a share of your sympathy also, father. I am more wretched than he; for I shall lose Charlotte.

FIRMIN. I hear footsteps. It is the Minister and his mother. Let us go! I would avoid even the semblance of wishing to attract his attention.

[*Exeunt.*]

## SCENE III.

*De Narbonne, Madame Belmont.*

MAD. BELMONT. Have you seen Monsieur Selicour?

DE NARBONNE. I have not seen him to-day.

MAD. BELMONT. You must confess, my son, that you possess a real treasure in that man.

DE NARBONNE. He appears to be very efficient in his department, and now that I am transferred from my rural retirement to this great city and so arduous a position, where book-learning by no means suffices, I must consider myself fortunate indeed to have encountered a person like Selicour.

MAD. BELMONT. Who understands everything, who is ignorant of nothing. He has taste and knowledge, great conversational powers, and most pleasing talents. Music, painting, poetry,—he is at home on all of them.

DE NARBONNE. Well, and my daughter?

MAD. BELMONT. I am glad you remind me of it. She has attained her seventeenth year; she has eyes; Selicour is possessed of so many excellences. And he is gallant. His expression is animated in her presence. Oh, it has not escaped me! His delicacy of behavior, the tender attentions he pays her, are but little removed from love.

DE NARBONNE. Well, I should not consider it an objectionable match for my daughter. I do not look to accidental advantages of birth; for did not I rise from a humble station by my own exertions? And Selicour's intellect, attainments, and integrity may yet do much for him. I have myself already thought of him in connection with an honorable position, requiring an able and worthy man. Well, I shall test his powers; if, as I doubt not, he proves worthy of such a position, and if he succeeds in gaining my daughter's favor, I will gladly accept him as my son.

MAD. BELMONT. That is my only wish! He is so polite, obliging, and delightful a man.

## SCENE IV.

*De Narbonne, Madame Belmont, Charlotte.*

CHARLOTTE. Good-morning, dear papa!

DE NARBONNE. Ah, here is my Charlotte! How do you like this large city?

CHARLOTTE. I wish I were in the country again, as here I must actually watch for an opportunity to see my papa.

DE NARBONNE. I miss the honest country folks myself. With them I jested and was light-hearted; but, for that matter, I mean to remain so here. My duties shall not change my disposition; one may be very busy and still retain one's good humor.

MAD. BELMONT. I am delighted with this place, and fancy myself in heaven. I am already acquainted with hundreds of people, who are all very accommodating, and Monsieur Selicour has promised to subscribe for me at the Lycée.

CHARLOTTE. Guess, grandma, whom I believe I have seen to-day!

MAD. BELMONT. Whom?

CHARLOTTE. The young officer——

MAD. BELMONT. What officer?

CHARLOTTE. Young Charles Firmin.

MAD. BELMONT. Who came to your aunt's house at Colmar every evening?

CHARLOTTE. Who used to converse with you.

MAD. BELMONT. A fine young man!

CHARLOTTE. Isn't he, grandma?

MAD. BELMONT. Who wrote such beautiful verses?

CHARLOTTE. Yes, yes, he!

MAD. BELMONT. Now that he has arrived, I presume he will visit us.

DE NARBONNE. But what can be detaining Selicour? He keeps us waiting to-day.

MAD. BELMONT. Here he comes!

## SCENE V.

*De Narbonne, Madame Belmont, Charlotte, Selicour.*

SELICOUR (*bowing to all*). Good-morning! I am overjoyed at meeting you all here.

DE NARBONNE. Good-morning, my dear Selicour!

SELICOUR (*to De Narbonne, giving him some papers*). The writing which I deliver to you is the one we were speaking of; I deemed it expedient to append a few explanatory remarks.

DE NARBONNE. Excellent!

SELICOUR (*giving Madame a ticket*). I engaged a box for your ladyship for the new play.

MAD. BELMONT. Delightful!

SELICOUR. For Mademoiselle de Narbonne I bring this novel, pervaded by a healthy, moral tone.

CHARLOTTE. I presume you have read it, Monsieur Selicour?

SELICOUR. I have hastily looked over the first volume.

CHARLOTTE. Well, and——

SELICOUR. You will find a pathetic scene in it. A wretched father,—a degenerate daughter,—parents helpless, and abandoned by ungrateful children: horrors, which I cannot conceive, which are beyond my comprehension! For, can the gratitude of our whole lives counterbalance the care which they lavish upon our helpless childhood?

MAD. BELMONT. The worthy man knows how to throw feeling into everything he says.

SELICOUR (*to De Narbonne*). Our bureaux are at present in want of a chief, and the position being an important one, there are many applicants.

DE NARBONNE. I rely upon you. You will examine the claims of each. The years of service, the zeal, competency, and, above all, the integrity are to be taken into consideration. But I am forgetting that this must be signed. I go.

SELICOUR. And I, too, must hasten to work.

DE NARBONNE. Await my return here, I pray you. I desire to speak to you.

SELICOUR. But I have several writings to draw up before dinner.

DE NARBONNE. Stay, or return speedily. Your presence is necessary. A man of your attainments, of your uprightness, is precisely what I want. Do not forget to return soon. I have your welfare at heart.  
[Exit.]

## SCENE VI.

*Madame Belmont, Charlotte, Selicour.*

MAD. BELMONT. You can hardly imagine in what esteem my son holds you, Monsieur Selicour. But really, I must set about preparing for the reception of our relatives and friends, who will be here to supper this evening. May we expect you also, Monsieur Selicour?

SELICOUR. If my numerous duties——

MAD. BELMONT. On no pretense dare you be absent, otherwise the king of our feast were wanting. You are the soul of our society. And Charlotte, I wager, would be highly displeased if you did not come.

CHARLOTTE. I, grandma? Well yes. Your friends and those of papa may always be sure of a cordial welcome from me.

MAD. BELMONT. Very well! very well! And now you must dress. It is high time! I must inform you, Monsieur Selicour, that I shall superintend her dressing.

SELICOUR. When fair art lends its assistance to beautiful nature, what mortal can resist?

MAD. BELMONT. He is charming, charming! He never opens his mouth but to say something intellectual and gallant.  
[Exit with Charlotte.]

## SCENE VII.

*Selicour, Michael.*

MICHAEL (*entering*). At length she is gone. Now I can speak. Have I the honor of addressing Monsieur Selicour?

SELICOUR (*gruffly*). That's my name.

MICHAEL. Suffer me, Monsieur——

SELICOUR. Must I be molested even here? What do you want of me?

MICHAEL. Monsieur——

SELICOUR. Surely some petition, some request. I cannot serve you.

MICHAEL. Permit me, Monsieur——

SELICOUR. No! This is not the proper place. You may inquire at my private room some other time.

MICHAEL. So ill a reception I did not——

SELICOUR. What do you want?

MICHAEL. Why, I did not come to beg anything, but to offer my most dutiful acknowledgments to Monsieur Selicour.

SELICOUR. Acknowledgments? For what?

MICHAEL. For obtaining my nephew the situation.

SELICOUR. What?

MICHAEL. I am only in the house since yesterday, for the reason that my master left me behind in the country. When I wrote to you, I had not the honor of being personally acquainted with you.

SELICOUR. You don't say, my very dear sir! You belong to the Minister's household?

MICHAEL. His valet, at your service.

SELICOUR. Good heavens, what a mistake! Monsieur Michael, valet, body-servant, confidant of the Minister! I beg a thousand pardons, Monsieur Michael! Really, I am ashamed of myself, I am inconsolable for having treated you so rudely. Upon my word, Monsieur Michael, I took you for a clerk.



MICHAEL. And supposing I were one ?

SELICOUR. You see I am beset by so many importunate people. One cannot tell every person, you know, just by his dress.

MICHAEL. But one can be civil to all, I think.

SELICOUR. Certainly ! certainly ! It was an unfortunate fit of abstraction.

MICHAEL. Very disagreeable to me, Monsieur Selicour.

SELICOUR. I am sorry, extremely sorry ; I shall never forgive myself.

MICHAEL. Let it pass.

SELICOUR. Too gladly. Well, I have evinced my zeal for you ; your dear, dear nephew is now provided for.

MICHAEL. I have just left him ; the lad has brains.

SELICOUR. The young man will make his mark. Count upon my assistance.

MICHAEL. Doesn't he write a pretty hand ?

SELICOUR. He does not write badly.

MICHAEL. And his spelling—

SELICOUR. Yes, that is the principal thing.

MICHAEL. Hark you, Monsieur Selicour ! do not let his Excellency suspect anything of my letter to you. When he departed for the city, he strictly commanded us to solicit nothing. Master is a little queer.

SELICOUR. Is he ? Indeed ! You know the Minister very well, do you not ?

MICHAEL. As he treats his domestics familiarly, I know him by heart, and can, if you desire it, give you full information concerning him.

SELICOUR. I believe you, I believe you ! But I am not in the least curious, not in the least. You see, Monsieur Michael, my motto is : Do right and fear nobody.

MICHAEL. Well said !

SELICOUR. To continue our conversation. Proceed, Monsieur Michael. Your good master, you say, is somewhat peculiar ?

MICHAEL. He is queer, but good. His heart is as pure as gold !

SELICOUR. He is wealthy, a widower, an agreeable man, and in his most vigorous years. Confess that he does not hate women, the kind, worthy man.

MICHAEL. He has a susceptible heart.

SELICOUR (*with a sly smile*). Ha, ha! A few amours, is it not so?

MICHAEL. Perhaps; but upon this point——

SELICOUR. I understand, I understand, Monsieur Michael! You are a modest man, and know what secrecy is. I ask with the very best intentions; for I am persuaded I can hear nothing but what is honorable to him.

MICHAEL. Yes. Listen! He is looking for lodgings in one of the suburbs.

SELICOUR. Lodgings, and for whom?

MICHAEL. I shall get that out of him yet. But do not let a syllable of this escape you, you hear?

SELICOUR. Heaven forbid!

MICHAEL. He was gallant in his youth.

SELICOUR. And you believe, then, that he still——

MICHAEL. Not that exactly. But——

SELICOUR. Be that as it may! As the trusty servant of so worthy a master, you must throw the mantle of Christian charity over his failings. And why may it not be some secret act of benevolence? Why not, Monsieur Michael? I hate to put a bad construction upon an action. I mortally hate anything that looks like detraction. We must always think the best of our benefactors. Well, we shall see each other again, Monsieur Michael. You have forgiven my chill reception? Have you? Upon my honor as a gentleman, it still makes my cheeks redden with shame. (*Extends his hand.*)

MICHAEL (*refusing to take it*). Not so, not so, Monsieur Selicour! I know my station, and cannot so far forget myself.

SELICOUR. No ceremony, I pray. Number me among your friends. I must request that, Monsieur Michael.

MICHAEL. That I shall never venture to do. I am only a servant.

SELICOUR. You are my friend, my friend! No inequality exists between us. I request it earnestly, Monsieur Michael.

(*They salute each other, and the curtain falls.*)

## ACT SECOND.

### SCENE I.

*De Narbonne and Selicour, seated.*

DE NARBONNE. Are we at last alone?

SELICOUR (*uneasily*). Yes.

DE NARBONNE. This interview is of great importance to me. I already entertain a very high opinion of you, Monsieur Selicour, and am confident that it will be greatly enhanced before we separate. To business, then, and let all false modesty be laid aside. They say you are well versed in diplomacy and politics?

SELICOUR. I have labored much in both, and perhaps not altogether unprofitably. But, for all that, I cannot consider myself skilled.

DE NARBONNE. We shall see. In the first place, then, what do you regard as the essential qualifications for a good ambassador?

SELICOUR. He must above all possess dexterity in managing public affairs.

DE NARBONNE. Dexterity, yes; but which must always be joined with the strictest honesty.

SELICOUR. That is precisely what I mean.

DE NARBONNE. Proceed.

SELICOUR. He must endeavor to win the love of the foreign court where he resides.

DE NARBONNE. Yes, but without derogating from his own dignity. He must assert the honor of the state he represents, and procure respect for it by his deportment.

SELICOUR. The identical thing I was about to say. He must not pocket an insult, and must show himself a man of consequence.

DE NARBONNE. A man of consequence, yes ; but without being arrogant.

SELICOUR. That is precisely what I mean.

DE NARBONNE. He must have a watchful eye upon everything that——

SELICOUR (*interrupting*). He must have his eyes everywhere ; he must ferret out the most hidden matters.

DE NARBONNE. Without being a spy.

SELICOUR. That is precisely what I mean. Without betraying anxious curiosity.

DE NARBONNE. Without *having* it. He must know how to keep silence, and a modest reserve——

SELICOUR (*eagerly*). His countenance should be a sealed letter.

DE NARBONNE. Without being mysterious.

SELICOUR. That is precisely what I mean.

DE NARBONNE. He must have a peaceable spirit, and all dangerous differences he should try——

SELICOUR. To prevent, if possible.

DE NARBONNE. Quite right. He must possess an accurate knowledge of the population of the different countries——

SELICOUR. Of their situation, their productions, their imports and exports, their balance of trade——

DE NARBONNE. Quite right.

SELICOUR (*running on*). Their constitutions, alliances, resources, armies.

DE NARBONNE. To take an example. Supposing now it were Sweden, or Russia, to which you were dispatched : you possess, I presume, the necessary preliminary knowledge of these countries ?

SELICOUR (*embarrassed*). I must confess that, having occupied myself more with Italy, I am less familiar with the North.

DE NARBONNE. Hm !

SELICOUR. But I am just about to study it.

DE NARBONNE. Let us take Italy, then.

SELICOUR. The land of the Cæsars naturally first engaged my attention, Italy, the cradle of the arts, the birthplace of heroes, the scene of the sublimest virtue! What touching recollections for a heart capable of feeling!

DE NARBONNE. Very true. But to return to our subject.

SELICOUR. As you command. Ah, the fine arts exert so powerful an attraction! They furnish so much food for thought.

DE NARBONNE. It is Venice that first occurs to my mind.

SELICOUR. Venice! Right! It is on Venice I have begun an essay, in which I expatiate upon all matters of interest. I will run and fetch it. (*Rises.*)

DE NARBONNE. No, no! I cannot spare you now.

## SCENE II.

*De Narbonne, Selicour, Michael.*

MICHAEL. There is somebody without, who demands a secret hearing upon a very urgent matter.

SELICOUR (*very quickly*). I will not stand in your way.

DE NARBONNE. No! Stay, Selicour! I suppose this somebody will be content to wait a moment.

SELICOUR. But if it is urgent——

DE NARBONNE. The most urgent thing to me at present is our interview.

SELICOUR. Excuse me, but——

MICHAEL. His business will not take more than a few minutes, says the gentleman, and he is in a very great hurry.

DE NARBONNE. Return, I pray you, immediately after the visitor's departure.

SELICOUR. I shall be entirely at your disposal.

[*Exit.*

DE NARBONNE (*to Michael*). Let him enter.

## SCENE III.

*De Narbonne, La Roche.*

LA ROCHE (*bowing repeatedly*). I am—I presume—it is his Excellency the Minister in whose presence——

DE NARBONNE. I am the Minister. Draw nearer.

LA ROCHE. I crave pardon,—I—I have come—it is—I must—really, I am somewhat confused—the profound respect——

DE NARBONNE. Pshaw! never mind the respect, and tell me what brings you here.

LA ROCHE. My duty, my conscience, the love I bear my country. I have come to give you an important hint.

DE NARBONNE. Speak.

LA ROCHE. You have bestowed your confidence upon a man without either abilities or a scrupulous conscience.

DE NARBONNE. And who is that man?

LA ROCHE. His name is Selicour.

DE NARBONNE. What! Sel——

LA ROCHE. To speak plainly, this Monsieur Selicour is just as ignorant as he is villainous. Permit me to give you a short description of him.

DE NARBONNE. One moment! (*He rings the bell. Michael enters.*) Call Monsieur Selicour.

LA ROCHE. Not at all, your Excellency. His presence may be very conveniently dispensed with during our interview.

DE NARBONNE. By you, doubtless; but that is my way of proceeding. I never listen to any charges against individuals who are in no condition to defend themselves. When he stands face to face with you, you may begin your description.

LA ROCHE. But it is rather disagreeable to tell a person——

DE NARBONNE. Certainly, if you have no proofs. Should this be *your* case——

LA ROCHE. I did not calculate upon saying it right to his face. He is a subtle rogue, a wary knave. Oh, well! to his face, then, for aught I care. The deuce! I am not afraid of him.

DE NARBONNE. That will appear presently. Here he comes.

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SCENE IV.

*De Narbonne, La Roche, Selicour.*

DE NARBONNE. Are you acquainted with this gentleman?

SELICOUR (*greatly embarrassed*). It is Monsieur La Roche.

DE NARBONNE. I have requested your presence here, in order that you may defend yourself against him. He has come to accuse you. Now, sir, speak!

LA ROCHE (*after coughing*). I must inform you, then, that we were schoolmates together, and that, perhaps, he owes me some little gratitude. Both of us began life at the same time—it is now fifteen years—and both entered the same office as clerks. But Monsieur Selicour's career has been brilliant, whilst I still am at the spot whence I started. To forget the poor devil these many years, who was the friend and companion of his youth,—I will let that pass. I have nothing to say against it. But, after forgetting him for so long a period, to think of his old friend only for the purpose of unjustly depriving him, as he has done, of the scanty pittance upon which he subsisted, that is hard and must exasperate me! He cannot allege the least thing against me; but I say of him, and boldly assert, that this Monsieur Selicour, who is now playing the honest man toward your Excellency, was a confirmed villain while the wind blew from another quarter. Now he assists you in accomplishing good; I know beyond a doubt that he honestly aided your predecessor in all his evil actions. Like a rascally lackey, the hypocrite, at each change, assumes his

master's manners simultaneously with the livery. He is a sycophant, a liar, a braggart, a supercilious fellow, base, when he has an object in view, and overbearing, insolent to all who have the misfortune to need him. When a boy, there was still something of good nature about him; but this human frailty has long since been overcome. Now he has sneaked into a splendid position, to which, I am persuaded, he is not equal. To himself alone he draws the eyes of his chief, keeping down men of ability, of genius,—men like Monsieur Firmin.

DE NARBONNE. Firmin! What? Is Monsieur Firmin employed in our bureaux?

LA ROCHE. A man of rare powers, you may believe me.

DE NARBONNE. I have heard of him. A most excellent man of business.

LA ROCHE. And the father of a family. His son made your daughter's acquaintance at Colmar.

DE NARBONNE. Charles Firmin! Yes, yes, very true.

LA ROCHE. A talented young man.

DE NARBONNE. Proceed, sir.

LA ROCHE. That is all. I think I have said enough.

DE NARBONNE (*to Selicour*). What have you to answer to these charges?

SELICOUR. I am taxed with ingratitude. I, ungrateful! My friend La Roche ought to know me better. His remaining so long in obscurity is not attributable to any want of good will, but of influence. What severe accusations against a man, whom he has found true these twenty years! Thus eagerly to launch his suspicions, to interpret my actions in the worst manner, to persecute me with this violence, this choler! As a proof of my great friendship for him——

LA ROCHE. Do you consider me a fool? *You*, my friend! And what evidence have you given of it?

DE NARBONNE. He has allowed you to finish speaking.

LA ROCHE. Then I am thought to be in the wrong?

SELICOUR. His place, it is true, has been given to



another, and no one merited this slight less than he. But I had hoped that my friend La Roche, instead of accusing me as an enemy, would come to my room as a friend and demand an explanation. For this, I acknowledge, I was waiting, and I rejoiced beforehand at the agreeable surprise I had in store for him. What inexpressible joy to me to render him happy beyond all expectation! For that very position of chief, of which your Excellency will recollect I spoke this morning, I intended to propose my old friend La Roche.

LA ROCHE. *Me* for the position of chief! I am very much obliged, Monsieur Selicour. I am a clerk and not a man of business. My pen, not my head, constitutes my recommendation; and I am not one of those who take burdens upon themselves to which they are unequal, and then secretly shove them on the shoulders of others, appropriating all the merit.

SELICOUR. The situation is a suitable one for you. Believe *me*, who know you better than you know yourself. (*To De Narbonne.*) He is a first-rate worker, accurate, indefatigable, with plenty of common sense, and deserves to be preferred to all his competitors. He charges me with keeping down men of genius, and he adduces Monsieur Firmin. The example is badly chosen, however excellent the man is. Firstly, his present situation is not bad, though he certainly deserves a better, and this I have found already; for I was about to recommend Monsieur Firmin to your Excellency as my successor, in case of being transferred to the post which my generous patron designs for me. He maintains that I am not equal to my present office, and I am well aware that my endowments are only moderate; but he should reflect that this charge lies more against my employer than against myself. If my capacities are indeed inadequate to the office I fill, he must be censured who intrusted it to me, and who has frequently expressed his satisfaction with my feeble talents. And finally, I am charged with having been the late Minister's accomplice! I com-

pelled him to hear the voice of truth ; I boldly spoke the language of honesty at a time when my accusers perhaps crouched in the dust before him. Twenty times I was on the point of leaving the service of this incompetent functionary ; nothing restrained me but the hope of proving useful to my country. How sweet a reward for my heart, when I was enabled to prevent something wicked, to effect something good ! Whilst he was in authority I bade defiance to his power, I contended for the good cause against him ; he fell, and my most heart-felt sympathy was accorded him in his misfortune. If this is a crime, I am proud of it, I glory in it. It is hard, my dear La Roche, very hard, to see you ranged on the side of my enemies, to be under the painful necessity of defending myself against a man whom I esteem and love. But, come ! let us make up, restore your friendship to me, and all shall be forgotten !

LA ROCHE. The rascal ! Why, he almost affects even me.

DE NARBONNE. Well, what reply have you to make ?

LA ROCHE. I ? None. The confounded rogue is putting me entirely out.

DE NARBONNE. It is a brave and commendable act, Monsieur La Roche, fearlessly to attack and relentlessly to pursue a villain, no matter what his position ; but to persist obstinately in unjust hatred indicates a corrupt heart.

SELICOUR. He does not hate me. By no manner of means. My friend La Roche has the kindest heart in the world ; I know him. But he is hot-headed, and his place forms his means of support,—that excuses him. He thought his maintenance gone. I confess I have done wrong. Come ! come ! Let us embrace, and all shall be forgotten !

LA ROCHE. Embrace you ? Never ! To be sure, I cannot understand how he contrives to deceive me, to deceive your Excellency ; but—in short, I stick to my accusation. No peace between us, until I have unmasked and exposed him.

DE NARBONNE. I am satisfied of his innocence, unless stubborn facts, perfectly valid proofs, convince me of the contrary.

LA ROCHE. Facts! proofs! I can furnish a thousand.

DE NARBONNE. Speak out.

LA ROCHE. Proofs enough, a multitude of them; but, there's the rub! I can prove nothing by them. One cannot establish anything against such arrant knaves! Formerly he was as poor as I am; now he lives in affluence. If I should tell you that he converted his former influence into money, and that thence originate all his riches—I cannot, indeed, substantiate what I say; but God knows it to be the undeniable truth, by which I will live and die!

SELICOUR. This charge is of too vile a character to reach me; however, I will submit to the most rigid examination. All I possess is the fruit of fifteen years of industry; I have acquired it by sleepless nights and in the sweat of my brow, and I do not think I spend it ignobly. It supports my poor relations, it prolongs the life of my indigent mother.

LA ROCHE. A lie! a lie! To be sure, I can prove nothing; but it is a lie, a barefaced lie!

DE NARBONNE. Pray, moderate your tone, sir!

SELICOUR. Great heavens! What do I live to see! Can it be my friend La Roche who uses me thus? What madness has seized you? I know not whether to laugh or grow angry at this manifestation of fury. But laugh at the expense of a friend who considers himself aggrieved,—no, I cannot! It is too serious. Thus to misjudge your old friend! Recover your senses, my dear La Roche, and do not, at least, deprive yourself of the excellent place I have designed for you by such ill-judged stubbornness.

DE NARBONNE. To speak candidly, Monsieur La Roche, this obstinacy gives me no good opinion of you. Must I, also, beg you to act justly toward your friend? Upon my honor, I sincerely pity poor Monsieur Selicour.

LA ROCHE. I believe that, your Excellency. Why, he almost disconcerted me for a moment, despite my just indignation. But no, no ! I know him too well, I am too confident of ultimate success. War, war between us, and no reconciliation ! I perceive that here all further talk is useless ; but though the villain push me to extremities, I would a thousand times rather perish with hunger than be under obligations to him for my bread. I wish your Excellency good-day !

[*Exit.*]

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SCENE V.

*De Narbonne, Selicour.*

DE NARBONNE. Can you comprehend this stubborn persistency——

SELICOUR. It does not signify. He is a harmless fool, whom I shall soon pacify.

DE NARBONNE. He is rash and thoughtless, yet at heart he may be a good man.

SELICOUR. A most excellent man, I assure you, saving that his head seems slightly disordered. Or, perhaps, somebody is stirring him up against me.

DE NARBONNE. Do you think so ?

SELICOUR. There may be some hidden plot. Who knows ? Probably some secret enemy who envies me ; for this poor devil is only a tool.

DE NARBONNE. But who can it be ?

SELICOUR. There are so many who desire my ruin.

DE NARBONNE. Have you any suspicion ?

SELICOUR. I suppress it. To fancy such a thing of Monsieur Firmin, — fie ! fie ! it were shameful. Impossible !

DE NARBONNE. I think so, too. The man seems far too upright and modest to do such a thing.

SELICOUR. Modest, yes, that he is !

DE NARBONNE. You know him, then ?

SELICOUR. We are friends.

DE NARBONNE. Well, what is your opinion of him?

SELICOUR. Monsieur Firmin, I should say, is a man such as you really like to have in an office; though not exactly gifted, yet a very skillful worker. Not that he is deficient in sense and knowledge,—by no means! He may know a great deal, but he never shows it.

DE NARBONNE. You make me anxious to form his acquaintance.

SELICOUR. I have frequently urged him to put himself forward; but perhaps he feels that he was created for a subordinate part and obscurity. However, I will——

DE NARBONNE. Do not trouble yourself. In the case of so worthy an individual I may, without detriment to my rank, take the first steps. I will myself seek Monsieur Firmin. But to return to the subject of our previous conversation, interrupted by La Roche.

SELICOUR (*embarrassed*). The hour is rather late.

DE NARBONNE. No matter.

SELICOUR. And this must be your time for receiving.

DE NARBONNE (*looking at his watch*). Yes, you are right.

SELICOUR. To-morrow we can——

DE NARBONNE. Well, I consent.

SELICOUR. I shall now——

DE NARBONNE. One word more.

SELICOUR. What is your pleasure?

DE NARBONNE. With one commission, requiring both ability and courage, I can at least intrust you now.

SELICOUR. I am at your command.

DE NARBONNE. Through my predecessor's maladministration a multitude of abuses crept into the government, which, in spite of all our exertions, are not yet reformed. A memorial must therefore be drafted, laying bare all these evils, and bringing home the truth to the government itself.

SELICOUR. But, with your Excellency's leave, I would remark that such a paper might entail serious consequences upon the author, upon yourself.

DE NARBONNE. We must not mind that, nor take

into account any danger, any personal consideration, when duty peremptorily bids.

SELICOUR. This sentiment is worthy of you.

DE NARBONNE. You are the man for this work. I need not tell you anything more about it, since you are as well and even better acquainted with the mischief than I am.

SELICOUR. And I trust my opinion respecting it coincides with yours.

DE NARBONNE. No doubt. The business calls for dispatch. I leave you. Lose no time; this is the favorable moment, and I would like, if possible, to forward the paper this very day to the authorities. Brief and to the point, much in little. Adieu! Pray, set to work immediately. *[Exit.]*

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## SCENE VI.

*Selicour, Madame Belmont.*

MAD. BELMONT. Are you alone, Monsieur Selicour? I waited till I thought he had gone; he must know nothing.

SELICOUR. Of what do you speak, Madame?

MAD. BELMONT. We intend giving a little concert this evening, and Charlotte is to make her débüt.

SELICOUR. She sings so beautifully!

MAD. BELMONT. You devote a little time to poetry occasionally, do you not?

SELICOUR. Who does not now and then make verses?

MAD. BELMONT. Well, then, write us a song or something of the kind for this evening.

SELICOUR. A ballad you mean?

MAD. BELMONT. We are especially fond of ballads.

SELICOUR. If zeal could compensate for want of genius——

MAD. BELMONT. Tut! tut! I understand you.

SELICOUR. My health does indeed require some such

amusement. I sat up all last night, looking through documents and correcting accounts——

MAD. BELMONT. A mean occupation.

SELICOUR. So that I really feel a little exhausted. Who knows? The sweet breath of poesy's flower may, perhaps, revive me, and thou, sacred friendship, balm of the heart!

## SCENE VII.

*Selicour, Madame Belmont, Robineau.*

ROBINEAU (*behind the scene*). I say, now! If he is within, I guess I've got a right to——

MAD. BELMONT. What means this noise?

ROBINEAU (*entering*). This confounded pack of servants, they think themselves more than their masters. I want to speak to Monsieur Selicour.

SELICOUR. I am the individual.

ROBINEAU. I'll soon find that out. Yes, by my troth, that's the man! His very self! I fancy I still see him racing the village boys. Well, take a look at me, take a good look! I reckon I've changed a little. Don't you know me?

SELICOUR. No.

ROBINEAU. Why, I am Jack, son of old Robineau, the vintner, who married fat Madelon, a relative of your grandfather's, Monsieur Selicour!

SELICOUR. Ah, yes! I recollect.

ROBINEAU. Well, I think it is the custom for cousins to embrace.

SELICOUR. With pleasure. Welcome, cousin!

ROBINEAU. I am much obliged to you, cousin.

SELICOUR. But let us go to my room, this house does not belong to me.

MAD. BELMONT. Do not let me disturb you, Monsieur Selicour. Look upon me as absent.

SELICOUR. With your permission, Madame. You are too obliging. I beg you will make allowance for his

rustic manners; he is a good, honest peasant, and a cousin whom I hold very dear.

MAD. BELMONT. It is indeed like you to do so, Monsieur Selicour.

ROBINEAU. I have just arrived, cousin.

SELICOUR. Ah, and whence come you?

ROBINEAU. Why, from our village, to be sure. But this here Paris is larger than twenty villages. It is more than two hours since I got out of the stage-coach, and I've been gadding about, trying to find you and La Roche, your neighbor and schoolmate, you know. Well, I've found you at last, and now I am satisfied.

SELICOUR. Do you come to Paris on matters of business, cousin?

ROBINEAU. On business? Well, perhaps I do. To be sure, I have some business——

SELICOUR. What is it?

ROBINEAU. To make my fortune here, cousin.

SELICOUR. Ha, ha!

ROBINEAU. Now, I think the business is important enough.

SELICOUR (*to Mad. Belmont*). You must excuse him.

MAD. BELMONT. He amuses me.

SELICOUR. He is very entertaining.

ROBINEAU. Peter, the drayman, said that you had made hay in Paris while the sun was shining; that when a youngster you used to be an arch rogue, about whom people said: He won't spoil, he'll make his way! Since then we heard of you; but the news sounded too good for us to believe! But when we couldn't doubt any longer, my father says to me: "Go, Jack! Hunt up your cousin Selicour in Paris. You won't repent the journey. Maybe your fortune will be made by a good marriage." I started instantly, and here I am! Don't be offended, Madame! The Robineaus always take the straight road; what the heart thinks the tongue must say,—and when I saw my dear cousin Selicour standing before me, my heart overflowed.

MAD. BELMONT. Why, that is very natural.



ROBINEAU. Hark you, cousin! I should like very much to make my fortune also. You know the secret, do tell me, pray.

SELICOUR. Always be honest, truthful, and modest! That is my whole secret, cousin; I have no other. All well at home?

ROBINEAU. Yes, thank God! the family is thriving. Bertrand has married his Susan; she'll be confined soon, and hopes that cousin Selicour will stand godfather. All are getting along well, except your poor mother, who complains that it is very hard to be suffering want whilst her son in the city possesses such wealth.

SELICOUR (*in a low tone*). Hold your tongue, block-head!

MAD. BELMONT. What does he say of your mother?

SELICOUR (*aloud*). Is it possible? The thousand dollars which I remitted did not reach her, then? This wrings my very soul! What bad arrangements they have at these post-offices! My poor, good mother! what sufferings she must have endured!

MAD. BELMONT. She must receive assistance at once.

SELICOUR. Of course! I shall instantly ask the Minister to grant me leave of absence; it is a just demand, and one upon which I can insist. The duty of nature is paramount. I shall hasten to the village, and in a week all will be adjusted. She would not consent to remove to Paris, urgently though I entreated her; for my dear old mother is so strongly attached to the place of her birth.

ROBINEAU. I'll be blamed if I understand her, then! She told us she would gladly have come to Paris, but you would not listen to anything of the kind.

SELICOUR. The good woman herself does not always know what she wants. But to know her in distress,—good God! that grieves me and cuts my heart.

MAD. BELMONT. I indeed believe you, Monsieur Selicour. But your fertile mind will soon devise the means for changing all this. I shall retire now and

leave you alone with your cousin. Happy the wife who shall one day possess you! So dutiful a son will certainly make a tender husband. [*Exit.*]

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SCENE VIII.

*Selicour, Robineau.*

ROBINEAU. Faith, cousin, I am quite surprised; I did not at all expect so hearty a reception from you. He is very proud and haughty, they said, he won't recognize you as a relative.

SELICOUR (*after looking carefully about the room, to discover whether Madame Belmont is really gone*). Tell me, you jackass, what has entered your head, that you fall upon me at such an unseasonable time?

ROBINEAU. Well, as I told you before, I have come to make my fortune.

SELICOUR. To make your fortune! You numskull!

ROBINEAU. Why, cousin, how shamefully you use me! I will not be handled so.

SELICOUR. You want to play the sensitive fellow, eh? What a pity for your anger! To run away from his native village to Paris! The vagabond!

ROBINEAU. But what does this sudden change in your behavior mean, cousin? First the friendly reception, and now this harsh tone. This is not acting fairly and honestly; don't think hard of me for saying that it is acting falsely, and if I were to let people know how you treated me, it would not bring you much honor, that it would not!

SELICOUR (*frightened*). Let people know? What?

ROBINEAU. Ay, ay, cousin!

SELICOUR. Attempt it if you dare, rascal! I will obtain a place for you, and provide for my mother. Be quiet, I will dispose of you. Depend upon it!

ROBINEAU. Well, if you—

SELICOUR. But this is not the proper place to speak of these matters. Come! Away to my room!

ROBINEAU. You see, cousin, I'd like to make an easy and comfortable living. If you could manage to get me into the excise-office——

SELICOUR. I will send you to the right place, depend upon it! (*Aside.*) Back to the village with this cursed hind, as fast as his legs can carry him!

[*Exeunt.*]

## ACT THIRD

### SCENE I.

*La Roche and Charles, meeting.*

LA ROCHE. I have been seeking you for some time. Listen! I have kept my promise and given the Minister a description of Monsieur Selicour.

CHARLES. Ah? And it is all over with him? all over?

LA ROCHE. Well, not exactly. Not entirely yet; for I must tell you he lied so audaciously, that I stood there like a perfect fool. The hypocrite feigned emotion; he acted the tender friend, the generous man, toward me; he overwhelmed me with protestations of friendship, and desires to appoint me chief of the office.

CHARLES. What! Why, that is splendid. I congratulate you.

LA ROCHE. I took him to be a fortune-hunter, I believed he cared only for office and money; never should I have imagined him so false and perfidious. The hypocrite, with his honeyed twaddle! He did not entrap me, however, for I flatly declined.

CHARLES. And so we are still where we were? And my father is no better off than before?

LA ROCHE. Very true; but just let me go on! let me go on!

CHARLES. Nor have I made any progress. I stole

into the garden, hoping to meet my beloved. I hoped in vain! A few stanzas, composed in my solitude, are the whole result.

LA ROCHE. Excellent! admirable! Keep on writing poetry to your beloved; meantime I will pursue the track of my game. The rogue is decidedly mistaken, if he supposes I have abandoned my design.

CHARLES. This is beneath our dignity, my dear La Roche! Let this wretch follow his dirty trade; we will extort by our merits what he obtains through sneaking and meanness.

LA ROCHE. Away with this pride, I say! It is weakness, it is prejudice, which causes you to speak so. What! wait until honesty rules the world? Then we may wait a long time indeed. All are intriguing, and we will do so, too, for the nonce, in the interest of the good cause. However, that does not concern you. Keep on composing your verses and cultivating your talent; it is for me to make it of avail. Let that be my care.

CHARLES. Yes, but do not lose sight of prudence. You have allowed yourself to be badly caught to-day.

LA ROCHE. Nor will this be the last time. But no matter. I will go on, I will not be discouraged; I will make so many and so frequent thrusts at him, that I must strike him in the end. I have been his fool long enough, and mean to retaliate now. If we allow the fellow to proceed in this style, your father will soon be branded as a fool, and I as a villain.

CHARLES. Hark! Some one is approaching.

LA ROCHE. It is Selicour himself!

CHARLES. I cannot endure the sight of him. I shall return to the garden and finish my poem. [*Exit.*]

LA ROCHE. I must go also, and shall set to work instantly. But no; it were better, perhaps, to remain. The coxcomb might really fancy me afraid of him.

## SCENE II.

*Selicour, La Roche.*

SELICOUR. Why, here is Monsieur La Roche !

LA ROCHE. Myself, Monsieur Selicour.

SELICOUR. Very much abashed, I perceive.

LA ROCHE. Not particularly so.

SELICOUR. Your furious attack upon me has proved useless, you see. Your friend has wasted his ammunition.

LA ROCHE. It does not signify.

SELICOUR. Upon my word of honor, friend La Roche, notwithstanding you press me so very hard, I cannot help pitying such silly caprices as yours.

LA ROCHE. Do not force yourself, pray ; Monsieur de Narbonne is not present

SELICOUR. What would you have of me ?

LA ROCHE. Be insolent to your heart's content.

SELICOUR. Indeed !

LA ROCHE. Boast of your triumph. You have obtained a victory over me.

SELICOUR. Well may I be proud of having vanquished so formidable an adversary.

LA ROCHE. Though I have failed to-day, under your instruction I shall soon grow proficient.

SELICOUR. What, Monsieur La Roche ? You will still persevere in injuring me ?

LA ROCHE. We do not give up a game because of one unlucky move.

SELICOUR. The trusty esquire of honest Firmin. Well ! who would have thought it ?

LA ROCHE. This honest Firmin often helps you out of difficulties.

SELICOUR. What does he pay you for your knightly services ?

LA ROCHE. What do you pay him for the elaborate documents he writes for you ?

SELICOUR. Beware, friend La Roche! I could cause you serious trouble.

LA ROCHE. Now, do not get angry, friend Selicour. Anger betrays an evil conscience.

SELICOUR. To be sure, your silliness ought to elicit only a smile.

LA ROCHE. You despise an enemy who seems to you too feeble. Very good. I shall endeavor to gain your respect. [Exit.]

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### SCENE III.

*Selicour.*

They want to make Firmin ambassador. Softly, softly, my fine fellow; we have not reached that point yet. But Firmin always treated me so kindly. Probably it is his son—the young man who composes verses, yes, certainly—and it is La Roche instigating them. This man Firmin has his merits, I must confess, and if they rouse his ambition, I know no one who could prove more dangerous to me. This must be prevented. But in what a dilemma I am! These same Firmings are highly necessary to me just at this moment: the father through his knowledge, the son through his poetry. So I will first derive all the good I can from them, and then get rid of them as soon as an opportunity offers.

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### SCENE IV.

*Selicour, Firmin.*

SELICOUR. Ah, here you are, Monsieur Firmin. I was just about going to your house.

FIRMIN. My house?

SELICOUR. To advise with you.

FIRMIN. Upon what?

SELICOUR. A mean, contemptible action. My dear Firmin, it quite consoles me to see you. An attempt has been made to set us at variance.

FIRMIN. To set us at variance?

SELICOUR. Ay, indeed. But I hope they will not succeed. I am your true and sincere friend, and have proved myself such to-day, I think, when this hot-headed La Roche tried to blacken my character to the Minister.

FIRMIN. What? Can La Roche——

SELICOUR. He leveled the most malignant accusations at me.

FIRMIN. He has lost his situation. Fancy yourself in his place.

SELICOUR. He is an ingrate. And after all, too, that I have done for him. And he asserted that he did it to render you a service; but he served you ill in seeking to injure me. What else do I desire but your welfare? I know better, however, than this hotspur what can really promote your interests, and have already devised a little plan with that view. The turmoil and bustle of the bureaux are hateful to you, I know; you do not like to live in the noisy city. You shall be provided for, Monsieur Firmin! You will select some silent and secluded spot, draw a good salary, and I shall send you work; you take pleasure in working, and there will be no scarcity of it.

FIRMIN. But how——

SELICOUR. As yet, however, these are mere ideas, some time will elapse before they are realized. Happy is he who passes his days amid rural scenes! Alas! Monsieur Firmin, such great happiness will not be mine. I am chained to the city, a slave to circumstances, and exposed to the shafts of malignity. I also considered it the duty of an affectionate relative to dispatch a cousin, who wanted to settle here, back to the country as speedily as his legs could carry him. My honest cousin! I gladly gave him the money to pay his way back; for, tell me yourself, is it not far

better to live unfettered in the country, though in obscurity, than to drudge and toil in the city?

FIRMIN. Exactly my opinion. But what did you intend doing at my house?

SELICOUR. Well, as I remarked before, above all to assure myself of my dear colleague's friendship,—and then—you have so often assisted me in my perplexities; I do not conceal it, I owe you so much, so very much. My place is killing me; I am so overwhelmed with business that, verily, I need all my wits just to turn round. Are you satisfied with our new Minister?

FIRMIN. I admire him.

SELICOUR. Yes, he is what I call a capable chief. And surely it was high time to appoint such a man, in order to avert the impending ruin. "All is not yet as it should be," I said to him to-day; "if you desire all things to take a proper course, you must present a memorial, wherein such matters as still require correction are pointed out with the most rigid adherence to truth." He eagerly seized my idea, and wishes to have a paper of this description drafted without delay. He directed *me* to do this; but the multitude of duties resting upon my shoulders,—I positively tremble at the thought of any addition to them.

FIRMIN. And you count upon me, then, do you not?

SELICOUR. Yes, I confess that I do.

FIRMIN. You could not have addressed one better fitted for the task.

SELICOUR. Oh, I am satisfied of that! I am satisfied of that!

FIRMIN. Having been so long an eye-witness of the abuses existing under the former Minister's administration, and not content with merely sighing as an idle spectator, I committed my complaints and plans of reform to paper, and thus it chanced that the work which is required of *you* has already been done by *me*. I had no definite purpose in view; I wrote merely to ease my oppressed heart.

SELICOUR. Is it possible that you——



FIRMIN. It is all ready, if you would like to make use of it.

SELICOUR. Make use of it? With joy! Why, this is a most fortunate accident!

FIRMIN. But the papers are not in the finest order.

SELICOUR. Oh, I will cheerfully take upon myself the trifling labor of arranging them. This very evening the Minister shall receive the memorial; I will name you as the author, yours shall be the undivided glory.

FIRMIN. You know that I am not very anxious on that point. If I can only accomplish some good, it imports little under what name.

SELICOUR. Worthy, excellent man! Nobody can do greater justice to your unassuming merit than I. You will let me have the papers?

FIRMIN. I will go for them instantly, if you have no objection to wait.

SELICOUR. Yes, go! I will await your return.

FIRMIN. Here comes my son, who will keep you company in the mean time. But tell him nothing of this, do you hear? I request it.

SELICOUR. And why not?

FIRMIN. For certain reasons.

SELICOUR. Well, if you absolutely command it; but I shall find it very difficult not to mention your complaisance. (*After Firmin is gone.*) The poor fellow! No doubt he fears being soundly rated by his son.

## SCENE V.

*Selicour, Charles.*

CHARLES (*enters, reading a paper, which at sight of Selicour he quickly hides*). This man Selicour again! (*About to leave.*)

SELICOUR. Stay, stay, my young friend! Why do you flee society thus?

CHARLES. I beg your pardon, Monsieur Selicour. (*Aside.*) The deuce! why did I run into the jabberer's way?

SELICOUR. I have long had a great desire to see you, my noble fellow! How fare the Muses? How flow our entrancing numbers? Good Monsieur Firmin, I know, has divers objections against them, but he is wrong. You have such decided talent! If you were only known to the world; that, however, will be effected by-and-by. Not longer ago than this morning I was speaking of you——

CHARLES. Of me?

SELICOUR. To the Minister's mother, and they are already prepossessed in your favor from the manner in which I mentioned you.

CHARLES. Ah? And what was the occasion?

SELICOUR. She professes to be a judge, though how the notion ever entered her head I cannot conceive. Everybody flatters her on her son's account. How if you were to make your court to her in a refined and skillful way? Indeed, I was just on the point of seeking you in regard to this. She has requested a few stanzas of me for this evening. Now, in my time, I also wrote poetry, as many people do; but my present disagreeable labors have caused my poetic talent to grow rusty. Supposing, now, you were to write the verses for me? You would intrust them to me, and I should read them to the company. All would be enchanted with their beauty; they would question me about the author; I—I should *name* you and seize the opportunity to enlogize you. Your fame would be in every mouth, and in a short time the new poet will be complete, as illustrious by his genius as by his sword!

CHARLES. Brilliant prospects these, certainly.

SELICOUR. It lies entirely in your power to realize them.

CHARLES (*aside*). He is trying to wheedle me. He is all deceit, I know perfectly well that he is deceitful; but how weak am I against such praise! Really, he

might wheedle me against my will. (*To Selicour.*) What did you say they wanted for this evening?

SELICOUR. A trifle. Nothing but a little song,—into which some delicate trait in praise of the Minister might be unaffectedly introduced.

CHARLES. I am no panegyrist! The dignity of the poetic art shall not meet with such disparagement from me. All praise, be it ever so well deserved, is flattery when bestowed upon the great.

SELICOUR. You have all the pride of a true son of the Muses. No encomiums, then; but let there be love—tenderness—feeling——

CHARLES (*looking at his paper*). Could I have divined when writing them, that an occasion would so soon present itself for their use!

SELICOUR. What? Are these some of your verses?

CHARLES. I beg pardon. A very feeble performance.

SELICOUR. Pshaw! Exactly what we want, by heaven! Quick, give them to me! You shall hear of their powerful effect. There is no absolute need of its being a ballad; these bagatelles—these pretty little trifles—often avail more than people believe; by them the women are gained, and the women are everything. Give me the verses. Give them to me! What? You hesitate? Oh, very well, as you like. I desire very much to be the means of your becoming known; you do not care to be known; keep your verses! I had your advantage, not mine, in view.

CHARLES. But supposing——

SELICOUR. If you act in so affected a manner——

CHARLES. But I do not know——

SELICOUR (*snatching the paper from him*). You behave like a child. Give them to me! I will serve you even against your will; your father shall soon do justice to your talents. Here he comes. (*Puts the paper into the right-hand pocket of his coat.*)

## SCENE VI.

*Selicour, Charles, Firmin.*

FIRMIN. Here, my friend; but nobody must know of it. (*Gives him the paper secretly.*)

SELICOUR. I know how to keep silence. (*Puts the paper into the left-hand pocket.*)

CHARLES (*aside*). Was I wrong in letting him have them? What harm can he do with my verses?

SELICOUR. My worthy friends, you have indulged me with a most delightful quarter of an hour; but I am forgetting myself in your company. The Minister awaits me. It is with great reluctance that I tear myself away; for one always profits by the society of such worthy persons. [*Exit, holding both pockets.*]

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## SCENE VII.

*Charles, Firmin.*

FIRMIN. And this is the man whom you accuse of intriguing and cabals, when no one here takes a greater interest in me!

CHARLES. You may consider me a dreamer; but the more he tries to please you, the more I distrust him. The honeyed tone which he adopts in speaking to you—well, either he needs your assistance or he is plotting your ruin.

FIRMIN. Fie upon your distrust! No, my son; and though I should fall a victim to malice, never will I believe ill of others while the shadow of a doubt remains!

## SCENE VIII.

*Charles, Firmin, La Roche.*

LA ROCHE. Ah, Monsieur Firmin! I am rejoiced to hear that the Minister intends paying you a visit.

CHARLES. My father a visit?

FIRMIN. Me?

LA ROCHE. Yes, you! I well remarked that the moment your name escaped my lips, you immediately excited his attention. Selicour does not relish it, either, and thus my action of to-day has effected some good.

CHARLES. To be driven into the foreground, in spite of yourself! How very fortunate an event!

FIRMIN. Of course, your unbridled imagination already beholds in me an ambassador and minister. Monsieur de Narbonne has some little commission for me to execute,—that is all, I suppose.

LA ROCHE. No, no, I assure you! He is desirous of cultivating your acquaintance. Nor is this all. No! His eyes have been opened at last! Selicour, I am confident, is on the verge of ruin. This very day—it is shameful and outrageous—but I will say nothing. The Minister sent to your house to inquire for you, when he learned that you were at the office. In all probability he will seek you here. Did I not predict it? See, there he is already. (*Retires to the background.*)

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SCENE IX.

*Charles, Firmin, De Narbonne.*

DE NARBONNE. I have seen specimens of your work, Monsieur Firmin, which give me an exalted idea of your abilities, and on every side I hear them praise your uprightness and modesty. Men of your character are extremely necessary to me, and I have, therefore,

come to request your aid, your advice, and co-operation in discharging the arduous duties of the office which has been intrusted to me. Will you grant me your friendship, Monsieur Firmin?

FIRMIN. Such great confidence abashes me, and I pride myself upon it. With joy and gratitude I accept your kind offer; but I fear they have given you too high an opinion of me.

CHARLES. They have told you nothing more than the truth, Monsieur de Narbonne. I beg you not to credit my father's assertions on this point.

FIRMIN. Do not commend such ordinary merit too highly, my son.

DE NARBONNE. So this is your son, Monsieur Firmin?

FIRMIN. Yes, sir.

DE NARBONNE. The Charles Firmin of whom my mother and daughter made mention this morning?

CHARLES. And do your mother and the amiable Charlotte still remember Charles Firmin?

DE NARBONNE. They said many flattering things of you.

CHARLES. Would I were deserving of so much kindness!

DE NARBONNE. I shall be happy to enter into closer intimacy with you, sir, and with your estimable father. If it is my duty, Monsieur Firmin, to seek you, it is indisputably yours to afford me an opportunity of finding you. Let the incompetent yield themselves to disgraceful indolence! The talented man who loves his country tries to attract to himself the eyes of his superior, and to obtain the position which he is conscious of deserving. The blockhead and the worthless man are ever ready to appropriate the merit of others. How are we to discriminate between false and true worth, if the latter never enters the lists against its despicable rival? Consider, Monsieur Firmin, that we are answerable as well for the good we *neglect* to do, as for the evil we *suffer* to be done.

CHARLES. Do you hear, father?

FIRMIN. Give me an opportunity to serve my country, and joyfully will I embrace it.

DE NARBONNE. I ask no more. In order that we may become better acquainted with one another, I invite you both to sup with me this evening. You will find quite an agreeable company,—a few chosen friends and some relatives. All constraint and formality will be banished; and my mother, whom my new station has not inflated with pride, will receive you in the most friendly manner, I promise you.

FIRMIN. We accept your kind invitation.

CHARLES (*aside*). I shall see Charlotte!

LA ROCHE (*aside*). Things are progressing fairly,—the moment is favorable,—courage! I will make another pass at Selicour! (*Advancing.*) At length you do justice to merit. Good! It remains now to unmask vice. Luckily I find you here, and can go on where I left off this morning. Selicour has silenced me to-day,—I blundered, I confess, in putting the cart before the horse; but truth is truth. I am right for all that! You demanded facts; I am provided with them.

DE NARBONNE. What do you say?

LA ROCHE. This man, who makes believe that he is the support of his mother and his whole family, extended a fine reception to a poor devil of a relative, who sought him to-day in good faith, trusting, in his simplicity, to obtain some petty situation through Selicour's agency. The hypocrite drove him away, as though he were some incorrigible scamp. This is how he treats his relations; and how utterly depraved his heart is, his suffering mother——

FIRMIN. You wrong him grievously, my dear La Roche. This same relative, whom you say he has driven away, returns to the village loaded with benefits and cured of delusive hopes.

DE NARBONNE. Toward this same relative he behaved very civilly.

LA ROCHE. What?

DE NARBONNE. My mother was present during their conversation.

FIRMIN. Do not thus blindly follow the dictates of revenge, my dear La Roche.

DE NARBONNE. Nobly said, Monsieur Firmin. Will not *you* speak a word for him?

FIRMIN. He is absent. It is my duty to defend him.

DE NARBONNE. This sentiment does you honor, Monsieur Firmin; Selicour behaved in a similar manner toward you this morning. How I rejoice to see myself surrounded by such estimable men! (*To La Roche.*) But you, sir, who pursue poor Selicour with such unrelenting vindictiveness, really do not seem to me the honest man you are represented. All I have witnessed so far is anything but creditable to you.

LA ROCHE (*aside*). I am bursting with rage. But patience—patience!

DE NARBONNE. The more they assail good Monsieur Selicour, the more I feel disposed to add to my good opinion of him, and I purpose to unite him more closely to me.

CHARLES (*confusedly*). In what way?

DE NARBONNE. My mother has formed certain projects, which meet my entire approval. Your happiness, Monsieur Firmin, I have likewise at heart. This evening you shall learn more. Pray do not be late. (*To Charles.*) You, my young friend, devote yourself to the poetic art, I understand; my mother praised your talent this morning. Let us soon have some of your verses. I, too, love the Muses, though prevented from serving them. Your servant, gentlemen! No ceremony, I beg.  
[*Exit.*]

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## SCENE X.

*Charles, Firmin, La Roche.*

CHARLES. I shall see her! I shall speak to her! But those projects of her grandmother—heavens, I tremble! Scarce a doubt can exist of her being destined for Selicour.

FIRMIN. This is a fortunate day, my son.



LA ROCHE. Yes, for you, Monsieur Firmin; but is it for me?

FIRMIN. Dismiss your anxiety. I hope to succeed in setting all right. (*To Charles.*) Act prudently, Charles, and do not at least forget yourself under the Minister's very eyes.

CHARLES. Never fear! But you, father, bestir yourself at last.

FIRMIN. Good! I am getting my lesson, too.

CHARLES. Am I not right, Monsieur La Roche?

FIRMIN. Let *his* example be a warning to you. Courage, La Roche! if my intercession can avail you aught, your cause is not yet lost. [*Exit.*]

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## SCENE XI.

*Charles, La Roche.*

LA ROCHE. Well, what do you say to this? Is it right for your father himself to give me the lie, and to take the scoundrel under his protection?

CHARLES. My dearest friend, this morning I disdained your services, now I implore you to help me. There can no longer be any doubt that Selicour is her destined husband. I am unworthy of possessing so bright a jewel; but this worthless fellow deserves her much less.

LA ROCHE. Do I need a spur to goad me on? You witnessed the ill treatment I have had to endure on his account. Listen to me! It has come to my ears that the Minister this day intrusted him with a very nice and important piece of work, which must be finished before evening. He will either fail to perform this duty, or else he will produce something worse than wretched, thus causing his incapacity to appear. In spite of his insinuating manners, all hate him and wish his ruin. No one would make the slightest effort to help him, I warrant you; in such detestation is he held.

CHARLES. I will prevent my father from doing so.

(*Aside.*) I see very well now why he wheedled my poem from me. Can he really have the front to declare himself the author in my presence?

LA ROCHE. Come with me into the garden. He must not meet us together. You call yourself my master, good Monsieur Selicour! Beware! Your apprentice is being well trained, and before night he shall be your teacher! [Exeunt.]

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## ACT FOURTH.

### SCENE I.

*Madame Belmont, Charlotte.*

MAD. BELMONT. Stay, Charlotte! We must have a little talk together before the company arrive. Tell me, my child, what do you think of Monsieur Selicour?

CHARLOTTE. I, grandma?

MAD. BELMONT. Yes, you!

CHARLOTTE. He seems to be quite an agreeable, deserving, and worthy man.

MAD. BELMONT. It pleases me exceedingly to hear this. I am glad, my dear child, that you entertain so favorable an opinion of him; for, if your papa and I have any influence with you, Monsieur Selicour will soon be your husband.

CHARLOTTE (*astonished*). My husband!

MAD. BELMONT. Does that sound so strange?

CHARLOTTE. Monsieur Selicour?

MAD. BELMONT. We believed that your happiness could not be better attained.

CHARLOTTE. Gladly will I accept a husband from you and papa. But—perhaps you think me capricious, dear grandma,—I know not—this Monsieur Selicour, whom I esteem for all that, against whom I have no objection to make, I cannot tell you how it happens, but when I think of him as my future husband, I experience in the very depths of my heart a kind of—

MAD. BELMONT. Not dislike, I hope?

CHARLOTTE. *Dread* I should even call it. I know I am wronging him, yet I cannot overcome the feeling. I fear him more than I love him.

MAD. BELMONT. Enough, Charlotte! I can account for this fear, my daughter.

CHARLOTTE. No. You misunderstand me.

MAD. BELMONT. It is maidenly coyness, and most charming. I ought to know that, believe me; was I not young myself? Moreover, this match is suited to your family. A gentleman, who knows everything; a man of taste; an excellent connoisseur; and such an obliging and tried friend! And all the families here are contending for him, too. If he was not grieving so deeply about his mother just now, he would have promised me to write you a ballad for this evening; for he can accomplish anything, and he is very anxious to please you even to the smallest trifle. But I hear his footstep. He never disappoints a body. He is a model of a man.

## SCENE II.

*Madame Belmont, Charlotte, Selicour.*

SELICOUR. You requested me this morning to write a tender, pathetic song for you. I have done my best, Madame, and lay it at your feet.

MAD. BELMONT. What, Monsieur Selicour! Have you finished it already? Indeed, I was apprehensive that the unpleasant news——

SELICOUR. What unpleasant news?

MAD. BELMONT. About your mother.

SELICOUR. About my mother? Ah, yes—I—I have just received a letter from her—a letter informing me that at length——

MAD. BELMONT. She has received the thousand dollars. Well, I rejoice to hear so.

SELICOUR. Could I else have summoned up sufficient composure? But, thank Heaven, now this load is

removed from my heart, and in the first overpowering emotion of joy I composed the stanzas which I have had the honor to present to you.

MAD. BELMONT (*to Charlotte*). It would have grieved you to see him. Here it was that the whole excellence of his heart became apparent to me. I am in love with your ballad, Monsieur Selicour, even before reading it.

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### SCENE III.

*Madame Belmont, Charlotte, Selicour, De Narbonne.*

DE NARBONNE. Selicour here with you! Truly, dear mother, you are drawing him away from more necessary matters. He has so much to do, and you burden him besides with useless commissions.

MAD. BELMONT. Why, why, my son! Now do not get angry!

DE NARBONNE. What is to become of the memorial, so very important and pressing?

SELICOUR. The memorial is finished. Here it is.

DE NARBONNE. What! Already done?

SELICOUR. And I beg you to believe that I have spared neither time nor labor in executing the work.

DE NARBONNE. But how is that possible?

SELICOUR. The abuses of the late administration but too often weighed heavily upon my heart. I could not rest content with merely deploring them; I committed my indignation, my censures, my plans of amelioration to paper, and thus it chanced that the work which you ordered me to prepare was long since done by me in secret. Nor should I, indeed, have lacked the courage to step forth with it publicly, had the government not of itself recovered its reason, and in you appointed a man capable and desirous of restoring harmony and peace to all. The time having now come to make public use of these papers, nothing more was necessary than to arrange the sheets, and that was done in a few moments.

MAD. BELMONT. Now, my son, I think you may be satisfied. Monsieur Selicour fulfilled your desire before he knew it, co-operated with you; and a most fortunate accident has caused you to meet each other.

DE NARBONNE. With joy I perceive that we hold the same views. Give it to me, Monsieur Selicour; this very evening the memorial shall be sent to the authorities.

SELICOUR (*aside*). All goes well. Now for removing Firmin, who is in my way. (*Aloud.*) Your pardon, Monsieur de Narbonne, but I am extremely sorry to say that I cannot resist the belief that Monsieur La Roche's accusation of this morning has made some impression upon you.

DE NARBONNE. Not the slightest.

SELICOUR. I was fearful it had. Judging from appearances, La Roche has already given my place to another.

DE NARBONNE. What?

SELICOUR. I always have thought very highly of Monsieur Firmin, but I must confess his conduct is beginning to puzzle me.

DE NARBONNE. What! Only this morning you praised his kind disposition.

SELICOUR. Can the best-natured man be trusted beyond a certain point? I see myself surrounded by enemies; snares are being laid for me.

DE NARBONNE. You wrong Monsieur Firmin. I know him better, and will answer for him.

SELICOUR. Would I were able to think as honorably of him!

DE NARBONNE. La Roche's base ingratitude has, naturally enough, awakened distrust in you. But if you harbor the shadow of a doubt against Firmin, you will presently have an opportunity to rectify your error.

SELICOUR. How?

DE NARBONNE. He will be here in a few moments.

SELICOUR. Monsieur Firmin—here?

DE NARBONNE. Yes, I could not deny myself the pleasure. I have seen him.

SELICOUR. Seen him! Excellent!

DE NARBONNE. He and his son will take supper with us this evening.

SELICOUR. Supper,—and his son, too! Delightful!

MAD. BELMONT and CHARLOTTE. Charles Firmin?

DE NARBONNE. The young lieutenant, whose merits you have so frequently praised. I invited both of them to supper.

MAD. BELMONT. I will welcome them with pleasure.

DE NARBONNE (*to Selicour*). I trust you do not object?

SELICOUR. Not at all; quite the contrary.

MAD. BELMONT. I like the father beforehand, for the son's sake. And what says our Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE. I am entirely of your opinion, grandma.

DE NARBONNE. You will then be able to speak candidly with each other.

SELICOUR. Oh, there is no necessity for it, not the slightest. I have always considered Monsieur Firmin a most honorable man, and if I wronged him for a moment, I cheerfully acknowledge my error. For my part, I am persuaded of his friendship for me.

DE NARBONNE. He has evinced it. He mentions you with great respect. Our acquaintance dates only from to-day, it is true, but he surely deserves——

SELICOUR (*interrupting*). All the encomiums which, as you will recollect, I bestowed upon him a while ago. Nature has so constituted me; my heart knows nothing of malevolence.

DE NARBONNE. He has both a deep mind and an excellent heart, while no man is less animated by a passion for glory than he. I believe he could absolutely resign to another all the glory arising from the labors he has performed.

SELICOUR. You think so?

DE NARBONNE. He is the man to do it.

MAD. BELMONT. His son, I dare say, thinks differently upon this point.

CHARLOTTE. Yes, he is a young and fiery poet, who will not stand being trifled with.

SELICOUR. Do you suppose he would give up to another any glory he had achieved?

CHARLOTTE. I am in very great doubt as to that.

DE NARBONNE. I love such mettle in a young soldier.

SELICOUR. Of course, it is very promising.

DE NARBONNE. If to each is assigned his proper position, both will render excellent service.

SELICOUR. How very kind of you to interest yourself thus in competent persons!

DE NARBONNE. It is my duty. (*He speaks to his daughter.*)

SELICOUR. It was. (*Aside to Madame Belmont.*) One word, Madame. People might really think that you divert me from the business incident to my vocation. If, therefore, my poem should happen to be sung this evening, do not mention me.

MAD. BELMONT. If you do not wish it, no.

SELICOUR. Ah, I have it! How would it be if, with a view to greater security, I should request one of the company to avow himself the author?

MAD. BELMONT. What! You would resign the glory to another?

SELICOUR. Pooh! A trifle.

[*Enter Firmin and Charles.*

CHARLOTTE (*perceiving them, with animation*). Here they come!

#### SCENE IV.

*Madame Belmont, Charlotte, Selicour, De Narbonne, Firmin, Charles.*

DE NARBONNE (*going toward them*). I expected you before this, gentlemen. Draw nearer! I cordially bid you welcome. Monsieur Firmin, this is my mother, and this my daughter. You, sir, are no stranger to my family.

MAD. BELMONT (*to Charles*). I should not have ex-

pected to see you here in Paris; it is delightful so unexpectedly to meet dear friends.

CHARLES. Upon that name I set a high value. (*To Charlotte.*) You have left your aunt's, I presume, Mademoiselle de Narbonne?

CHARLOTTE. Yes, Monsieur Firmin.

CHARLES. I shall never forget the happy days I spent in your society. It was there, Mademoiselle——

DE NARBONNE (*to Firmin*). We will leave the young people to renew their acquaintance. Well, Monsieur Firmin, here is Monsieur Selicour.

SELICOUR (*to Firmin*). Really—I am—I cannot express the joy I feel—to see you introduced to Monsieur de Narbonne's family.

DE NARBONNE. I am confident you will do justice to each other. (*To Firmin.*) Something is weighing upon his heart. I wish you would come to an explanation, gentlemen!

SELICOUR. Not so! not so! Monsieur Firmin is assured of my friendship.

DE NARBONNE. And be assured of his also. I wish you could have seen with what ardor and devotion he took your part to-day. In all likelihood, La Roche has again——

SELICOUR. But what in the world is thus inciting La Roche against me?

DE NARBONNE. La Roche is not the man for me, —at least I have a poor opinion of his character.

FIRMIN. You wrong him. I have spoken *against* him to-day, but now I must defend him.

SELICOUR. It is quite unnecessary. I prize his worth; I know his guileless heart; but I also know his crotchets. And though he blacken my reputation to all the world, it matters not, so long as you discredit his assertions. You see, we have done, our quarrel is adjusted, no further explanation is required.

MAD. BELMONT. Will you not be seated, gentlemen?

SELICOUR (*to Charles*). I have already presented the poem.

CHARLES. Indeed?



SELICOUR. The old lady has it, and I have not concealed the author's name from her. (*Taking Madame Belmont aside.*) Can you guess what I have been doing?

MAD. BELMONT. Well?

SELICOUR. Young Firmin—you know he writes verses——

MAD. BELMONT. Yes. Well?

SELICOUR. I requested him to avow himself the author of the ballad, and he consents.

MAD. BELMONT. Consents? I should say he does.

SELICOUR. But I firmly rely upon your not betraying me.

DE NARBONNE. Let us devise some means of entertaining ourselves, dear mother, till our guests arrive. I shall not ask you to play cards, as we can find a better pastime.

FIRMIN. We are at your commands.

CHARLES. It rests with Madame Belmont to decide.

CHARLOTTE. Are you still fond of music, Monsieur Firmin?

DE NARBONNE. True, Charlotte, you do not sing badly. Let the gentlemen hear you. Have you nothing new to give us?

CHARLES. If it is not too much trouble for Mademoiselle Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE. A few stanzas have just been handed me.

DE NARBONNE. Good! Meantime, with your permission, I will peruse our friend's memorial.

SELICOUR. But we shall disturb you, I fear, Monsieur de Narbonne.

DE NARBONNE. Oh, no! I am accustomed to work amid every kind of disturbance, and this is only reading. (*Goes to the opposite side of the room and sits down.*)

SELICOUR. But if you would rather——

DE NARBONNE. I beg your pardon; but there must be no delay. Duty before everything.

MAD. BELMONT. Let him read, then, if he wishes it, and we will have the song.

(*They all seat themselves, and in the following order: Charlotte first, Madame Belmont beside Charlotte, Selicour between Madame Belmont and Charles, then Firmin.*)

CHARLOTTE. The melody, I perceive, is equally well chosen.

MAD. BELMONT. The author is not very far from here. I can see him without spectacles.

SELICOUR (*softly to Mad. Belmont*). Do not betray me. (*To Charles*.) That was intended for you, my dear fellow.

CHARLOTTE. For him? What?

FIRMIN. Is it true, Charles? Are you——

SELICOUR. He is the author.

CHARLOTTE (*to her grandmother*). What? Is Monsieur Firmin the author?

MAD. BELMONT (*aloud*). Yes. (*In a whisper*.) Do not mention the true author's name.

CHARLOTTE. Why not?

MAD. BELMONT. There are reasons. (*To Selicour*.) Will you not accompany Charlotte?

SELICOUR. With pleasure.

FIRMIN (*angrily to Charles*). Surely some of your hasty work again,—but you will persist in rhyming——

CHARLES. But, dear father, hear before you condemn.

CHARLOTTE (*sings*).

\*Beside the brook the boy reclined,  
And wove his flowery wreath,  
And to the waves the wreath consigned,—  
The waves that danced beneath.  
“So fleet mine hours,” he sighed, “away,  
Like waves that restless flow:  
And like my bloom of youth decay  
The flowers that float below.”

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\* No apology, I trust, need be made to the reader for giving Lord Lytton's more successful translation of these stanzas in place of my own.—TRANS.

MAD. BELMONT (*looking at Selicour*). A very promising beginning!

SELICOUR (*pointing to Charles*). The compliment belongs to that gentleman.

MAD. BELMONT. True, true! I understand.

FIRMIN. The thought is commonplace, ordinary.

CHARLES. But true, nevertheless.

DE NARBONNE (*on the opposite side, busied with the paper*). The introduction is very good and instantly commands attention.

CHARLOTTE (*sings*).

"Ask not why I, alone on earth,  
Am sad in life's young time;  
To all the rest are hope and mirth  
When spring renews its prime.  
Alas! the music Nature makes,  
Her thousand songs of gladness,—  
In me that music only wakes  
The heavy heart of sadness."

MAD. BELMONT. Ravishing!

FIRMIN. Not bad.

SELICOUR (*to Charles*). You see how everybody is admiring you.

DE NARBONNE (*reading*). Excellently developed, and expressed in emphatic language. Come, read with me, Monsieur Firmin! (*Firmin goes to the Minister's side and reads over his left shoulder.*)

MAD. BELMONT. Divine!

SELICOUR (*goes to the side of De Narbonne*). I must remind you that I am under great, very great obligations to Monsieur Firmin. (*Returns to the other side and resumes his seat between Mad. Belmont and Charles, but without losing sight of the other two.*)

CHARLOTTE (*sings*).

"Ah! vain to me the joys that break  
From Spring voluptuous are;  
For only *One* 'tis mine to seek—  
The Near, yet ever Far!"

I stretch my arms, that shadow-shape  
In fond embrace to hold,  
Still doth that shade the clasp escape—  
The heart is unconsolated!

“Come forth, fair Friend, come forth below,  
And leave thy lofty hall,  
The fairest flowers that Spring can know  
In thy dear lap shall fall!  
Clear glides the brook in silver rolled,  
Sweet music fills the air,  
The meanest hut hath space to hold  
A happy loving pair!”

MAD. BELMONT. How pathetic the conclusion is! The dear girl is quite overcome by it.

CHARLOTTE. No matter who wrote it, it has emanated from a heart that knows what love is.

SELICOUR (*bowing to Charlotte*). This is very flattering praise.

CHARLES. What! He is returning thanks——

SELICOUR (*turning quickly round to Charles*). Isn't it, my dear friend?

MAD. BELMONT. I am quite transported.

SELICOUR (*bowing to Madame Belmont*). You are too gracious, Madame.

CHARLES. How am I to take this?

SELICOUR (*quickly to Charles*). Well, did I not tell you so? You have achieved a most complete victory.

CHARLES. Is he mocking me?

DE NARBONNE. This paper is excellent, most excellent!

SELICOUR (*to Firmin*). You see I have scrupulously heeded your injunction.

FIRMIN (*smiling*). I must confess you have.

CHARLOTTE. I do not know to which of the two gentlemen——

SELICOUR (*to Charlotte, pointing to Charles*). A sweet triumph for the author.

DE NARBONNE (*folding the memorial*). In truth, a perfect masterpiece.

SELICOUR (*bowing to De Narbonne*). You do me too much honor!

MAD. BELMONT (*repeating the last verses*).

"Clear glides the brook in silver rolled,  
Sweet music fills the air,  
The meanest hut hath space to hold  
A happy loving pair!"

Beautiful! Divine! Irresistible! Selicour, it is settled, you shall have Charlotte.

CHARLES. Good heavens!

CHARLOTTE. What do I hear?

DE NARBONNE (*rising*). Few papers of equal excellence have come under my notice. Selicour, you shall be the ambassador.

CHARLES. Merciful Father!

DE NARBONNE. Believe me, you shall receive the appointment. The man capable of writing *that* must be upright, must be possessed of rare genius.

SELICOUR. But, with your permission,—I do not know whether I can venture to accept it. Contented with my present lot——

DE NARBONNE. You must tear yourself away from everything, if the state requires your presence elsewhere.

SELICOUR. May I not, at least, request to have Monsieur Firmin appointed my secretary?

FIRMIN. What are you dreaming of? Me? Your secretary?

SELICOUR. Yes, Monsieur Firmin. I need your assistance greatly.

CHARLES. I believe that.

DE NARBONNE. We shall see. Well, how was the music?

SELICOUR. Mademoiselle Charlotte sang divinely.

## SCENE V.

*Madame Belmont, Charlotte, Selicour, De Narbonne, Firmin, Charles, Michael.*

MICHAEL. The company are assembled in the parlor.

DE NARBONNE. Have the kindness, dear mother, to

receive them. I shall send this off at once. (*To Selicour, in a low tone.*) Gain my daughter's consent, and with joy will I accept you as my son. Once again! this work is excellent, and I would give much to have written it. [*Exit.*]

SELICOUR (*to Charles*). Well, enjoy your triumph, Monsieur Firmin! (*To Charlotte.*) Our young friend receives these compliments with admirable self-complacency.

CHARLOTTE. After seeing such beautiful pieces of his own composition, I should not have believed that there was need of his decking himself out in borrowed plumes.

SELICOUR. Mere kindness, Mademoiselle! But the company are waiting.

FIRMIN (*to Charles*). Why, you have obtained overwhelming praise. (*Selicour offers Charlotte his arm.*)

CHARLES. Ay, I have every reason to glory.

MAD. BELMONT (*to Selicour*). That's right! that's right! Conduct Charlotte.—Everything becomes him so well! He is a charming man! (*She takes Firmin's arm.*)

SELICOUR (*pointing to Firmin*). To this gentleman, not to me, the praise is due. Indeed, I am uncertain whether I dare appropriate it, being indebted to him for all I am and for all I have accomplished. [*Exeunt.*]

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## SCENE VI.

*Charles.*

My uneasiness would betray me. I must compose my mind before following them. Have I really had the patience to endure all this? A fine triumph I have achieved! Their compliments were ridicule. It is evident that they think *him*, and not *me*, the author; I am their fool, and the villain gets all the glory.

## SCENE VII.

*Charles, La Roche.*

LA ROCHE. Ah, Monsieur Firmin! all alone! I trust matters are progressing as well as you could wish?

CHARLES. Oh, yes, splendidly!

LA ROCHE. I have great hopes also.

CHARLES. Selicour stands higher than ever in the Minister's favor.

LA ROCHE. You don't say!

CHARLES. A man of greater capacities, of more scrupulous probity, cannot be found.

LA ROCHE. Is it possible? But what of the important paper with which the Minister charged him, and to which his abilities are entirely inadequate?

CHARLES. The paper is finished.

LA ROCHE. Nonsense!

CHARLES. It is finished, I tell you.

LA ROCHE. You are jesting. It is impossible!

CHARLES. A masterpiece, both as to style and contents.

LA ROCHE. It is impossible, I say.

CHARLES. It *is* possible, I tell you! It was read, admired, and is now being sent off.

LA ROCHE. Then he must have made a contract with the devil to work for him.

CHARLES. And the post of ambassador——

LA ROCHE. Yes, the post of ambassador——

CHARLES. He will get it; he will get Charlotte's hand.

LA ROCHE. She despises him.

CHARLES. She will yield.

LA ROCHE. The position and the girl, too! No, by Heaven! It cannot be! It shall not be! What! Shall this hypocrite, this base villain, snatch a prize which should be awarded to merit alone? No, by my soul! We dare not suffer it,—*we*, who know him. It were against our conscience, we should be his accomplices, if we suffered it.

CHARLES. I will seek Madame Belmont instantly. I will enlighten her about the poem.

LA ROCHE. The poem,—pshaw! don't mention the poem. He may, perhaps, gain her favor by it; but do you suppose the Minister would let such a trivial thing determine him? No, sir! It is the *memorial*, which you say is so excellent, and which he must have obtained through witchcraft,—for he never wrote it, never, I'll swear to that. But his whole witchcraft consists in his artifice. We must beat him with his own weapons! By taking the straight road, we did not succeed; we must now try the crooked. Stop! I have an idea. Yes, it will do. Now go, go, that we may not be seen together!

CHARLES. But no indiscretion, Monsieur La Roche. Consider what is at stake!

LA ROCHE. My honor is at stake, sir; as precious to me as your affection is to you. Away! Go! You shall hear from me.

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## SCENE VIII.

*La Roche.*

Now let me reflect. It was constantly his practice to discover the weaknesses of his superiors, in order to make himself necessary to them. This very morning he spoke with the valet—the fellow is a blab. There was hinting at some gallant adventure of the Minister's—that he had engaged rooms in the suburb. I don't believe a word of it; but the attempt might be made. Hush! He comes!



## SCENE IX.

*La Roche, Selicour.*

SELICOUR (*not perceiving him*). Everything goes well, and yet—I am not free from anxiety. As yet, neither the position nor the girl is mine; and here are father and son lying in wait for me, who may snatch away both in a twinkling. If I could rid myself of them,—but in what manner? The Minister I cannot get at; these people that pursue the straight road need nobody, you cannot get them into your power. If there was something to hush up, if I could detect him in some weakness which would make me indispensable to him!

LA ROCHE (*aside*). Very good! I shall entrap him.

SELICOUR. Monsieur La Roche, I see!

LA ROCHE. It is I, and I have come, Monsieur Selicour,—

SELICOUR. What is your wish?

LA ROCHE. To acknowledge that I have wronged you, and to tender my humblest apologies.

SELICOUR. Ah!

LA ROCHE. Nor have I benefited even myself by my course of action.

SELICOUR. Yes, that is the prettiest of the matter; for I am satisfied it is no fault of your malignant tongue that I am not altogether ruined.

LA ROCHE. Unfortunately, this is true, and I can, therefore, scarcely hope to be forgiven.

SELICOUR. Aha! This is the state of affairs, is it? Are we beginning to grow more tractable?

LA ROCHE. I can no longer raise my hopes to the fine situation you intended for me; but, for our old friendship's sake, do not harm me!

SELICOUR. Harm you?

LA ROCHE. Do not, I implore you! Take pity on a poor wretch!

SELICOUR. But——

LA ROCHE. And as I have found somebody to plead for me with the Minister——

SELICOUR. Indeed? Somebody to plead? Who is it?

LA ROCHE. A lady, to whom Michael, the valet, directed me.

SELICOUR. Michael, the valet? Are you acquainted with this Michael?

LA ROCHE. Slightly. But, as it is his nephew who is driving me out of my place, he wanted to render me a service.

SELICOUR. The lady is probably a relative of the Minister's?

LA ROCHE. They say she is a beautiful woman, and that he is seeking lodgings for her in the suburb.

SELICOUR. Hush! hush! I do not care to know all this. And what is the lady's name?

LA ROCHE. I do not know.

SELICOUR. Very well.

LA ROCHE. I suppose Michael can give you some information.

SELICOUR. Me? Do you think it interests me that much?

LA ROCHE. I do not say that.

SELICOUR. It does not concern me; I never meddle with such matters. You intend seeing this lady to-morrow?

LA ROCHE. To-morrow.

SELICOUR. Some great secret seems——

LA ROCHE (*quickly*). Of course! of course! Wherefore I beg you will not let it attract the attention of any one.

SELICOUR. Enough! No more of this subject. I shall not harm you, Monsieur La Roche. I am evidently fated to oblige those who treat me with ingratitude. Notwithstanding the injustice you wished to do me, I love you still; and, to give you a proof of my disposition to oblige you, I will unite with your protectress,—yes, that I will, rely upon it!

LA ROCHE. Oh, you are too generous!

SELICOUR. But let this serve as a warning for the future.

LA ROCHE. Oh, you shall see——

SELICOUR. Enough! Let the matter rest.

LA ROCHE (*aside*). He has swallowed the bait. He is as good as caught already. How much ~~more~~ quickly do we attain our ends by knavery than by honesty!

[*Exit.*

SELICOUR. Now I must instantly hurry and see this valet Michael. Surely it is some amour. Capital! I'll clutch you, De Narbonne! You are human, also,—you have your weaknesses—and I shall be your master.

[*Exit.*

## ACT FIFTH.

### SCENE I.

*La Roche.*

They are still at the table. He will come out presently, the Minister. I declare I ran till I was out of breath; but, Heaven be praised, I am on the right track, and know all. I have you at last, friend Selicour! You could do nothing with the Minister whilst he was virtuous; but God be praised for his vices! Here are secrets to keep, services to be rendered; and the confidant, the pander, will have a sure game. He is under the impression that he has discovered one of the Minister's weaknesses. What a magnificent scope for his baseness! Go on! go on! We are better instructed, friend Selicour, and you do not divine that we are laying a dangerous—ay, dangerous—trap for you! The Minister comes. Courage! The decisive blow must now be dealt.

## SCENE II.

*De Narbonne, La Roche.*

DE NARBONNE. What! Is it again you who have asked to see me?

LA ROCHE. Let this be the last interview you grant me, Monsieur de Narbonne, if I fail this time to convince you; but your own honor and mine demand that I shall insist upon it. My previous attempts to destroy the good opinion you entertain of Monsieur Selicour have only had the effect of raising him and humbling me; nevertheless I do not despair of unmasking him at last.

DE NARBONNE. This is too much! My patience is exhausted!

LA ROCHE. One word, Monsieur de Narbonne. You are looking for lodgings in the suburb, are you not?

DE NARBONNE. What? What did you say?

LA ROCHE. They are intended for a lady, who, with her whole family, is in the deepest distress? Am I not right?

DE NARBONNE. You have dared to dog my footsteps, then?

LA ROCHE. Be not angry, I have but imitated your friend, Monsieur Selicour. It was he who first extracted this piece of intelligence from your valet this morning, and immediately put the most insulting construction upon the matter. I, however, have come to think quite differently of it; for, to confess the truth, I instituted a closer inquiry. I was there, I saw the lady in question. (*Laughing.*) She has reached quite a respectable age, while Selicour imagines her a young beauty. Oh, do not get angry! I beg you will send for him. Hear him patiently through, and if you do not come to the conclusion that he is a consummate scoundrel, I will bear the name of knave as long as I live. Here he comes: I shall retire, so that you may fathom all immediately.

[*Exit.*

DE NARBONNE. The madman! How passion and vindictiveness have blinded him! Could Selicour—  
No, no, no, no! It is impossible! impossible!

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SCENE III.

*De Narbonne, Selicour.*

SELICOUR (*aside*). He is alone. Now I must speak! Unless I hasten now to make myself necessary to him, Firmin will obtain his favor. Once master of his secret, he is completely at my mercy.

DE NARBONNE. I was just fancying, my dear Selicour, what the ministry will say of your memorial. I sent it off instantly; it is being read at this moment, and I doubt not but it will meet with unqualified approval.

SELICOUR. If it has yours, all my wishes are gratified. (*Aside.*) How shall I introduce it? I hardly think I run any risk; for the matter is all right. I will make straight toward it.

DE NARBONNE. You seem lost in thought, my dear Selicour?

SELICOUR. Yes—I—I was just thinking what malicious constructions slander can put upon the most innocent actions.

DE NARBONNE. What do you mean?

SELICOUR. It must out, I can no longer restrain my indignation. Evil tongues have dared to assail you. There was mention—I beg you—to answer me a few questions, and forgive my anxious friendship if I seem immodest.

DE NARBONNE. Ask. I will answer freely.

SELICOUR. If I may believe your valet, you are seeking quarters in the suburb?

DE NARBONNE. Since you know of it—why, yes.

SELICOUR. And with the utmost secrecy, I hear?

DE NARBONNE. Yes. I have, until now at least, kept it a secret.

SELICOUR. For an unmarried lady?

DE NARBONNE. Yes.

SELICOUR. Who is very (*hesitating*), very dear to you?

DE NARBONNE. I acknowledge, I take great interest in her.

SELICOUR (*aside*). Why, he makes no secret of it; the suspicion is a certainty. (*To De Narbonne.*) And you do not wish to attract attention, is it not so?

DE NARBONNE. If possible.

SELICOUR. Very good! very good! I understand. The matter is of a delicate nature, and the world judges with such malice. But I can be of service to you.

DE NARBONNE. You?

SELICOUR. I can be of service to you. Rely upon me.

DE NARBONNE. But how, pray?

SELICOUR. I will procure for you what you need.

DE NARBONNE. What?

SELICOUR. I have it! I will procure it for you. A quiet little house, remote, of a plain exterior, and unsuspected; but the interior fitted up with the utmost elegance,—the furniture and tapestry in the latest style,—a cabinet, divine and enchanting,—in short, the prettiest boudoir of any far and near.

DE NARBONNE (*aside*). Can La Roche be right? (*To Selicour.*) And what may be my hidden motive in looking for such quarters?

SELICOUR (*smiling*). In matters which one wishes to conceal from me, I know how to repress all pert curiosity. Recognize in me, however, a friend desirous of serving you; there is nothing I would not do to oblige you. Command what you please, and I will obey implicitly,—you understand me?

DE NARBONNE. Perfectly.

SELICOUR. We must exercise forbearance. I—I value good morals, it is true; but, as regards this point, if we only avoid giving public offense. Perhaps I go a little too far; but my good heart impels me, and my most ardent wish is your happiness.

## SCENE IV.

*De Narbonne, Selicour, Michael.*

MICHAEL. These letters have just been delivered.

[*Exit.*DE NARBONNE (*to Selicour*). These are for you.SELICOUR. With your permission, I must go. They are business letters, which require to be dispatched instantly. Gayly to work and gayly to pleasure, that is my disposition! [*Exit.*

## SCENE V.

*De Narbonne.*

I can scarcely recover from my astonishment. Selicour—yes, I doubt it no longer, this Selicour was my predecessor's execrable accomplice. I do not consider myself better than others; all have their faults; but to offer himself with such unparalleled shamelessness! And to such a monster I was about to sacrifice my child! With such a knave I was about to deceive the state! For friendship's sake, he said, he would do anything for me. Are they our friends who pander to our vices?

## SCENE VI.

*De Narbonne, La Roche.*

LA ROCHE. Well, he has just left you. May I inquire?

DE NARBONNE. I judged both *you* and *him* falsely. You have rendered me a real service, Monsieur La Roche, and at length justice is done you.LA ROCHE (*with joyful emotion*). You have dis-

covered, then, that I am an honest man? May I raise my head again?

DE NARBONNE. You have succeeded, you have unmasked the impostor; but how am I to yield a conviction, so long cherished, that genius and talent do not reside in corrupt hearts? This man, whom now I discern to be a villainous scoundrel, presented a paper to me this very day which would be an ornament to the greatest statesman and writer. Is it possible? I do not comprehend it. Such sound views, such transcendent genius, and so abandoned a character! I dispatched the memorial at once to the government, and I will wager that the letters I have just received are lavish in their praise of it. (*He opens one of the letters and reads.*) Right! It is as I said.

LA ROCHE. I cannot account for it. The work is really creditable, you say?

DE NARBONNE. Excellent.

LA ROCHE. Then I will wager he is not the author.

DE NARBONNE. But who is?

LA ROCHE. He is not, I will stake my life; for, after all, I would rather concede that he has heart than mind. Suppose we should try. Yes! yes! I have it! It must succeed. If you will lend me your support, Monsieur de Narbonne, he shall betray himself.

DE NARBONNE. How?

LA ROCHE. Leave that to *me*. He comes! Lend me your aid.

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## SCENE VII.

*De Narbonne, La Roche, Selicour.*

LA ROCHE (*passionately*). Gracious heavens! What a dreadful blow!

SELICOUR. What is it, Monsieur La Roche?

LA ROCHE. Such changes a single moment can effect!

SELICOUR. What ails you? What mean these lamentations, these exclamations of terror?



LA ROCHE. I am thunder-struck.

SELICOUR. But what is it?

LA ROCHE. That fatal letter! It has just reached the Minister. (*To De Narbonne.*) May I? Shall I?

DE NARBONNE. Disclose all.

LA ROCHE. He is deposed!

SELICOUR. God forbid!

LA ROCHE. Removed from office!

SELICOUR. Impossible!

LA ROCHE. Too true, alas! There was whispering of it before; but, not believing it, I hastened hither to ascertain the truth,—and the Minister himself confirms it.

SELICOUR. It is true, then, this terrible piece of news?

(*De Narbonne signifies assent by a gesture.*)

## SCENE VIII.

*De Narbonne, La Roche, Selicour, Madame Belmont, Charlotte, Firmin, Charles.*

LA ROCHE. Come, Madame! Come, Monsieur Firmin!

MAD. BELMONT. For mercy's sake, what has happened?

LA ROCHE. Cheer up our master! Bid him take comfort in his affliction!

MAD. BELMONT. His affliction!

CHARLOTTE. Great heavens! What do you say?

LA ROCHE. He has lost his office.

CHARLOTTE. Good God!

SELICOUR. I am astounded also.

MAD. BELMONT. Who could have foreseen such a misfortune!

CHARLES (*passionately*). Then is talent proscribed, and honesty a crime in this corrupt country! The

upright man can maintain himself scarcely a day, and fortune is constant only to villains !

DE NARBONNE (*very gravely*). Be not too hasty, young man ! Heaven is just, and sooner or later the guilty shall receive their punishment !

SELICOUR. But tell me, is it not known, at least, what has occasioned this unfortunate event ?

LA ROCHE. Alas, it is known but too well ! The whole misfortune is owing to a certain memorial.

FIRMIN (*eagerly*). A memorial ? (*To the Minister.*) The same I saw you reading a short time ago ?

SELICOUR. In which the government itself was handled with such freedom and boldness ?

LA ROCHE. Exactly. The same.

SELICOUR. This proves it. Was I wrong in asserting that it is not always advisable to speak the truth ?

DE NARBONNE. When duty imperatively bids, I consider nothing. Let the consequences be what they may, never shall I repent having done my duty.

SELICOUR. A beautiful sentiment, it is true ; but it will cost you a fine office.

LA ROCHE. And that isn't all. Some others may lose theirs also, it being well known that a Minister is seldom the author of the papers issuing from his bureaux.

SELICOUR. What am I to understand by this ?

LA ROCHE (*softly*). He lets no blow pass unnoticed.

FIRMIN. Explain yourself more clearly.

LA ROCHE. They are straining every nerve to discover the author of these severe censures.

SELICOUR. Are they ? And in all probability that individual would be involved in the Minister's ruin ?

LA ROCHE. Doubtless. It is very greatly to be feared.

SELICOUR. Well, I did not write them.

FIRMIN. I am the author !

DE NARBONNE. Do my ears not deceive me ?

MAD. BELMONT. What ! You, Monsieur Firmin ?

FIRMIN. I am, and glory in it.

LA ROCHE (*to De Narbonne*). Now, what did I tell you ?

FIRMIN. The glory of the work, if any, I should willingly have relinquished to Monsieur Selicour, but not its danger and responsibility. Until now I kept silence, but circumstances have compelled me to name myself as the author.

CHARLES. Right, father! You have spoken like an honorable man. Be proud of your misfortune, Monsieur de Narbonne; for my father cannot have written anything reprehensible. Oh, my heart tells me that this disaster may yet be a source of happiness; Charlotte's hand is no longer the victim of position,—greatness is vanishing, and timid love takes courage.

MAD. BELMONT. What words are these! Monsieur Firmin!

FIRMIN. Pardon the fervor of his sympathy, Madame! His full heart makes him go too far in the expression of his feelings.

DE NARBONNE. Each of you has betrayed his secret. Monsieur Firmin, you are the author of the memorial; it is but just, therefore, that you should reap the glory and reward accruing therefrom. The government appoints you ambassador. (*All manifest astonishment.*) Yes, I am still the Minister, and rejoice at being so, because vested with the power of rewarding true merit.

MAD. BELMONT. What is this?

SELICOUR (*in the most violent consternation*). What have I done!

DE NARBONNE (*to Selicour*). You see your schemes betrayed. We know you now, hypocrite, without virtue or talents! Base man, could you suppose me one of your stamp?

LA ROCHE. How vilely he construed a magnanimous act! I know all from the lady herself. This female, for whom he imputed to you a criminal passion, is an invalid matron, well advanced in years, the widow of a gallant officer who lost his life in his country's service, and to whom you discharged the debt due to him from the state.

DE NARBONNE. Do not mention it, I pray you. (*To*

*Selicour.*) You must perceive that your company is superfluous here.

*(Selicour withdraws in silence to the background.)*

LA ROCHE. I pity the poor wretch. Too well I knew that my hatred would subside the moment his glory was ended.

FIRMIN *(gently pressing his hand)*. Say no more! Let us go and console him.

LA ROCHE. Come! I am ready.

DE NARBONNE *(to Charles)*. Our animated young friend has become very silent all of a sudden. This silence is eloquent; I have read your heart, my dear Firmin. It was surprise which revealed to me your secret, and I shall never forget that your affection was modestly silent during our fortune, and only spoke when you thought misfortune at hand. Charlotte! *(She embraces her father.)* I see we understand each other. Expect everything from your father's love!

LA ROCHE. And I will take an oath upon it that Charles Firmin is the true author of the poem.

MAD. BELMONT. Is it possible?

CHARLOTTE *(with a tender glance at Charles)*. I never doubted it. *(Charles warmly kisses her hand.)*

MAD. BELMONT. The modest young man! I am sure he will make our child happy.

DE NARBONNE. Let your father be your model, and with joy will I accept you as my son. *(Partly to the players, partly to the audience.)* This time merit has obtained the victory. It is not ever thus. The meshes of falsehood and deceit ensnare the most virtuous; the honest man cannot make his way; creeping mediocrity advances further than winged talent; appearances rule the world, and justice is found upon the stage alone!

THE END.

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